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Registered nurse Beatriz Lapid soothes Martha Munoz, 74, in the Long Beach Memorial Medical Center COVID-19 unit Wednesday, Jan. 19, 2022. Courtesy of Long Beach Memorial Medical Center.

COVID-19 made virtual health care crucial—and now it's here to stay

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

In the past, if you had a minor injury or ailment and wanted a doctor's opinion, you went to a hospital. But during the global pandemic, when people were hesitant to visit a hospital—or encouraged not to unless it was an emergency—phone and computer screens replaced the walk-in visit for many.

Telehealth, or virtual care, has existed for years but has always accounted for a very small number of visits, according to Dr. Graham Tse, the COVID-19 physician-in-charge at Long Beach Memorial Medical Center.

"A lot of it has to do with regulations from all the governments in terms of reimbursement," Tse said. "One of the silver linings to the pandemic is that many accommodations were made to facilitate virtual care—for obvious reasons. It became very crucial."

In the first two and a half months of 2020, Memorial did about 50 scattered virtual visits, according to hospital data.

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NURSING SHORTAGE CONTINUES TO INTENSIFY AMID PANDEMIC

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

For a decade, the United States has faced a critical nursing shortage, which is expected to grow through 2030—and California is bearing the brunt of the crisis. The challenges caused by the shortage, though, continue to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic as it surpasses the two-year mark, according to local hospital officials.

"They lived through the first wave of the pandemic and are entering the third year," Tony Garcia, Long Beach Memorial Medical Center's chief nursing officer, said in an email. "With the rapid omicron spread in our communities, our staff is vulnerable to contracting the infection and if they become COVID positive, they must quarantine and isolate, which makes

day-to-day staffing more challenging."

Earlier this month, California health authorities announced hospital staff that test positive for the coronavirus could continue working if they have symptoms or none at all. The decision was a direct result of the staffing shortage amid the omicron surge that has seen a record number of new cases.

MemorialCare, for its part, opted to not implement the "immediate return to work" recommendation, Garcia said, for the safety of patients, physicians and other staff. COVID-positive asymptomatic staff members at St. Mary Medical Center, however, are returning to work.

"We continue to stay in close contact with state and county health departments to determine the best way to care for this surge of patients and ease the staffing crisis," a St. Mary

spokesperson said in an email. "This is an extremely challenging situation, and we are doing everything we can to ensure our hospitals can continue to operate while also keeping our staff and our patients safe."

The two hospitals are taking various steps to offset the staffing shortage amid the surge. St. Mary is limiting visitors to the hospital, pausing non-essential surgeries and temporarily closing non-essential services.

At MemorialCare, the hiring process has been expedited to secure more nurses and other staff more quickly and traveling nurses have been brought in to fill in the gaps, Garcia said. Additionally, the hospital has non-clinical staff assisting at testing and vaccine sites, it has limited visitation and is being more

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National, state and local health agencies update COVID-19 quarantine guidelines

BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor

As the world faces the third year of the coronavirus pandemic, guidelines from public health agencies continue to evolve—but experts have varying opinions on what those changes will mean in the fight against COVID-19.

One of the most recent examples was an announcement from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that it was shortening the recommended quarantine and isolation period for people who contract or are exposed to COVID-19.

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Strength does not come from physical capacity.

It comes from an indomitable will.

Mahatma Gandhi

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Vol. XXXV No. 2

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Public health experts assess omicron and COVID-19's long-term future



Cyan Wedgeworth takes information from testers as vehicles wait in long lines for COVID-19 testing at Veterans Stadium. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor

Yet another wave of COVID-19 has taken hold across the globe—this time, in the form of the omicron variant. Case levels, including in Long Beach, are topping any other point of the two-year pandemic. But public health experts say this surge is different.

Doctors and epidemiologists

throughout the region said in recent phone interviews that the mutations in the omicron variant, along with the relatively high vaccination rate in Southern California, differentiate the current surge from prior waves.

“Just with the caveat that we’re still learning about omicron, and we have a lot of anecdotal evidence or data from countries where it was first seen, it’s a

fluid situation,” said Dr. Graham Tse, the COVID-19 physician-in-charge for Long Beach Memorial Medical Center. “Omicron clearly is more transmissible than the previous variants.”

Whereas people who contracted the first variants would likely infect another two or three people, and those with the delta variant would infect five or six people, Tse said, one person with the omicron variant can infect up to 10 people.

“That is highly infectious,” he said. “It puts it right up there with about the level of measles. But also, the preliminary data does suggest that it causes somewhat less severe disease, especially respiratory disease, than were seen in previous surges.”

But while omicron’s transmissibility is due to its mutations, it’s still unclear whether the milder symptoms are due to the variant itself or to the higher vaccination rate in the population.

“I think the jury is still out on whether it is truly more mild in someone who is not immune,” said Dr. Jeffrey Klausner, a clinical professor of population and public health sciences at USC. “Without a doubt, in people who have prior immunity due to vaccination or previous infection, it is more mild and less likely to result in hospitalization.

So that’s why we are aggressively recommending vaccination in those who are unvaccinated and boosters for those

who have incomplete vaccination.”

Klausner said a major risk of omicron is a shortage of hospital workers because so many are being exposed to COVID-19.

“That hospital staffing shortage is compounded by the fact that people have left direct medical care services, so that there was already a kind of ongoing staffing shortage, and now you lay on top of that, 20, 30, 40% of the workforce testing positive, so they’re off work for a period of time,” he said. “That further makes it difficult to take care of patients, and we still have a fair amount of unvaccinated people who—some of them do end up in the hospital.”

In Long Beach, City Health Officer Dr. Anissa Davis said the Health Department has seen staffing impacts, but the team is still well-equipped to manage the omicron surge.

“I think the Health Department and city of Long Beach are facing the same staffing issues that all workplace sectors are facing right now, but we are adjusting and still meeting the demands,” Davis said. “Our daily case rate is the highest it’s been since the start of the pandemic. We’re in the low thousands everyday as far as the number of new cases, so that is a lot of work. We’re just very, very busy.”

Tse, at Memorial, had similar thoughts on how omicron is impacting

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Federal, state aid have allowed Long Beach to have robust response to COVID-19 pandemic

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

The Long Beach Health Department is entering the third year of responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, something it’s been able to do thanks in part to an infusion of tens of millions in federal and state funding, which is expected to last through July 2023.

The department has received \$57 million since the start of 2020 to help support things like testing, contact tracing and vaccine operations. Unlike other cities in the county, Long Beach and Pasadena have their own health departments and can issue their own health orders and operate their own testing and vaccine sites.

Jennifer Rice Epstein, a spokesperson for the Health Department, said that the funding is expected to last through 2022 and halfway through 2023, but the city is pursuing additional relief funds from the federal government to cover costs like other city employees being reassigned to help out with vaccine and testing clinics.

Long Beach issued over 408,000 tests just in 2021, and in the early days of 2022 began to exceed 6,000 tests per day as omicron took hold over the holiday season.

Rice Epstein said that each PCR test costs the city about \$42, including the cost for labs like Fulgent and Healthvana to process them and return results. Insurance typically covers the cost, but



A testing site set up outside the Long Beach Health and Human Services main building. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

whatever is not covered by insurance is covered by grants, she added.

Rapid tests have been provided to the city by the state at no cost to the city.

The size of the site and the demand for tests can also dictate how much the city has to pay to run them. A “mega-site” like the one at Veterans Stadium has cost as much as \$100,000 per month during a surge of testing demand, while a smaller site like the one at Houghton Park costs about \$25,000 per month during peak demand.

At least 346,622 residents had

received at least one dose of Pfizer, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson vaccine as of last week, according to city data.

Vaccine sites are covered by state and federal funds, but the city is seeking reimbursement for the extra staff needed to operate them who are reassigned from other city departments and charge their hours to the Health Department.

Rice Epstein said that the Federal Emergency Management Agency can cover these costs and has extended its reimbursement period for these types of costs through April.

Other costs like RVs used for mobile testing and vaccination operations, special refrigerators and freezers used to store vaccines and canopies, chairs and tables for staff working these sites are costs associated with the city’s response that are not necessarily apparent to the public, Rice Epstein said.

But the single largest cost has been staffing. The Health Department has hired more than 200 new employees to help with testing, vaccinations, contact tracing and case investigations.

If the pandemic begins to wane as some experts believe it could, Long Beach might not need additional funding for COVID-19 clinics past next July.

Last week, Dr. Anthony Fauci, chief medical advisor to President Joe Biden, said he believed the world was still in the first phase of the pandemic, which is where it is still negatively affected by infections.

However, he said the quick spread of the omicron variant could have a meaningful effect on collective immunity, which could mean countries like the United States could be getting closer to the “control” stage of the pandemic.

There is optimism that the pandemic could reach that point sometime this year, especially with antiviral treatments being approved and the evolution of variants expected to become less deadly. ■

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COVID Long-Term

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the local health care system.

“At MemorialCare, our hospitals have not been immune to the increase in the number of cases and hospitalizations, so we have seen increased numbers of patients both coming through our emergency department and that are requiring admission to our hospitals,” he said. “So in terms of operations, it has required us to re-implement some of the practices from prior surges, meaning designating units for COVID patients. But we’ve become very adept at adjusting to increasing and fluctuating numbers. We have plenty of [personal protective equipment]. Our staff are feeling very safe. They’re very comfortable with the practices we’ve really solidified.”

But just as prior surges have waned, the omicron wave will too. And some experts say there’s reason to believe it could end more quickly than prior waves.

“It’s hard to know, but the hope is—based on data from South Africa in particular—that omicron seems to move through populations fairly quickly,” said Dr. Timothy Brewer, a professor of medicine and epidemiology at UCLA. “So in South Africa, it took about three weeks to peak and start to fall off. I think it’s a little too soon to know whether that’s the case in the U.S. or not, but the hope is that [soon] we also will begin to see a drop in our cases.”

Once the omicron wave has subsided, though, COVID-19 will likely still be here to stay. Looking further out into the future, experts said some of the changes we’ve experienced over the last two years could become permanent.

“We’re going to have to learn to live with this virus, just like we live with other viruses that circulate within the population,” Brewer said, “and we’re going to need to develop strategies to try to minimize the impact of the virus on health and health care—and also on the economy and our general social behaviors in life.”

Brewer likened the lasting behavioral impact of COVID-19 to that of 9/11.

“We still take off our shoes when we go to the airport, even though it’s been 20 years,” he said. “I think we’ll need to adjust to new normals with [COVID-19]. For example, I think you will see people wearing masks much more in public going forward than ever occurred before 2019, and I don’t think it’s going to change anytime soon.”

At this point in the pandemic, Brewer said, it’s time to change some of the messaging around the virus.

“I think we need to get out of the framework of, ‘If we do everything right, this is going to go away,’” he said. “I don’t think it’s going to go away. So we now need to be in a framework of, ‘How do we minimize impact as much as possible?’”

And the best way to do that, he and others interviewed said, is to keep raising vaccination rates. ■



Andrew Garcia, left, and Manuel Rocha do work in the computer lab during the Computer Integrated Manufacturing class of the ACE Academy at Jordan High School. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

LBUSD sends students home with COVID tests, sees attendance tick back up

BY MIKE GUARDABASCIO / Reporter

The Long Beach Unified School District sent COVID-19 tests home with students last week—well after they were promised by the governor, who said he hoped they would head off a surge of potential omicron infections after winter break.

The tests are iHealth antigen rapid tests with results promised within 15 minutes, and each student is getting a box

with two tests in it. Students will receive additional kits in the weeks to come.

The tests are the ones promised by California Gov. Gavin Newsom, with the original intent being that all students in California could test prior to returning to campus after winter break. Instead, with the tests arriving from the state over two weeks late, the LBUSD is asking families to use theirs not for general asymptomatic screening, but to test after a possible exposure.

Long Beach begins offering COVID-19 boosters for children ages 12 to 15

BY KELLY PUENTE / Reporter

In the face of record daily COVID-19 infections, the city of Long Beach has begun offering vaccine booster shots for children ages 12 to 15 and for immunocompromised children ages 5 to 11.

Boosters were previously only authorized for those 16 and older. The booster will be Pfizer brand, as Moderna and Johnson & Johnson are only available for those 18 and older.

“The science tells us the omicron variant is highly contagious and causing an unprecedented rise in cases,” Mayor Robert Garcia said in a statement. “Data also shows that being fully vaccinated against COVID-19 and getting a booster can make symptoms much less severe and reduce the possibility of hospitalization. Right now, it’s as important as ever to make sure everyone in your household is vaccinated and boosted—and especially our youth.”

The booster shots are available five months after an eligible person receives his or her second dose of a vaccine. In Long Beach, 6,720 12- to 15-year-olds who completed the Pfizer two-dose series by Aug. 7 were eligible when the city began offering the boosters earlier this month.

Third doses for moderately or severely immunocompromised children ages 5 to 11 should be administered 28 days after their second dose.

“COVID-19 tests are recommended for your child when you receive a notification that your child has been exposed,” according to an LBUSD message sent to parents.

As Los Angeles County is starting to see signs that the omicron variant wave of COVID-19 may have peaked, the LBUSD is seeing encouraging signs of that as well. Districtwide attendance last week dipped to 78%, well below the district’s average of 95%, but many teachers reported higher attendance in their classes early last week after the three-day weekend, and the district saw many fewer teacher absences as well.

On Jan. 14, 508 of the district’s approximately 3,400 teachers were absent. By Jan. 18, that number fell to 394, comparable to the first day back from winter break two weeks prior. The district and the Teachers Association of Long Beach have said that most absences were due to teachers who had either contracted COVID-19 or were waiting for tests to clear them after a possible exposure. The district has been operating a staff- and student-specific testing site at Cabrillo High School to try and alleviate citywide strain on testing capacity.

The district’s own substitute teaching pool has been strained as well, with the unusually high number of teacher absences. When subs aren’t available, the district has filled classes with administrators or other staff holding teaching credentials. Already this month, hundreds of teacher absences haven’t been filled by a substitute teacher. ■

operated hospitals, which likely reflect conditions in other medical centers.

She also said that about 40% of COVID-positive patients at the county hospitals were admitted specifically because of the virus, while the rest only learned they were infected upon admission for something else. During the last winter surge, 80-90% of the COVID patients were admitted due to virus-related illness.

Ghaly said that despite the changes, current staffing shortages are creating more critical conditions at hospitals.

Ghaly said three Los Angeles-area hospitals—Mission Community Hospital in Panorama City, Little Company of Mary in San Pedro and Antelope Valley Hospital—have all established surge units to help handle the increase in patients.

Ferrer again stressed that while the omicron variant is easily capable of infecting vaccinated people, the shots are still proving to be effective in preventing infected people from winding up hospitalized.

She said unvaccinated people are nine times more likely to be hospitalized than fully vaccinated people, and 38 times more likely to be hospitalized than people who are fully vaccinated and received a booster shot.

City News Service contributed to this report. ■



Vehicles wait in line on the right side of Conant Street as they enter Veterans Stadium for the COVID-19 testing. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

Q&A: What to know about COVID-19 testing amid the omicron wave

BY HAYLEY MUNGUIA / Editor

We’re facing the third year and the fourth major surge of the pandemic. The omicron variant has brought the largest swell of new cases to date, with demand for testing again at an all-time high.

I was curious how the city manages this, and what the public should know about testing at this point. So I reached out to City Health Officer Dr. Anissa Davis to get some answers.

This interview has been edited for space considerations.

HAYLEY MUNGUIA: First, can you walk me through the difference between antigen, rapid and PCR tests?

DR. ANISSA DAVIS: There are different tests, so there’s the PCR, and that’s a test where you send it to a lab, and it takes a day or two, and the lab does it and sends you back your results. Then there’s the antigen—that test is looking for the actual genetic material of the virus, so that’s what it’s detecting. And then there’s the rapid, which is looking for part of the virus—and that is done, like it says, rapidly. It takes about 15 minutes or so.

As far as the effectiveness of the tests, the PCR is very sensitive. That means, because it’s picking up genetic material, it will turn positive if you have any type of genetic material of the virus. So that’s good because it will pick it up and it will give you a positive result. But sometimes, after you get

COVID, you can shed little dead virus particles for several days to weeks after you’re done with infection and you’re no longer contagious. That’s the downside of PCR, is that it’s picking up so much of your infection that might not necessarily be a problem for other people around you.

The antigen test is really good at picking up if you’re contagious, so you need to be at a certain load of virus in order for antigen to become positive, and that also is the level of virus where you’re contagious. So that’s kind of its claim to fame. It may not pick up every single infection you have, but it is really good at telling you whether you’re contagious to other people.

That being said, because omicron gives you milder symptoms, you don’t have that same level of viral load as with other variants, especially early on in your infection. And viral load is what you need for antigen, so an antigen test might not pick it up. So what we usually say is that if you have symptoms, you might want to get tested again, like in another day.

This is kind of how the tests have been all along. No test is 100% effective at finding every case.

HM: OK. And was the Health Department prepared for the current surge in demand for testing?

AD: I would say yes. I don’t think we predicted it, but I think that we rose to the demand, so you can get a test in Long Beach. We’ve expanded our

testing sites. We have a site for LBUSD students and staff. We have a site at the airport. So I do think we met the demand. I think that’s been kind of our response as a city and as a Health Department since the pandemic started, is ramping up quickly for the next thing in front of us.

HM: We’re entering year three of the pandemic, and some people still have difficulty finding a test or are waiting in long lines for testing appointments. What challenges still exist to respond to major waves of testing need?

AD: I haven’t heard that you cannot get a test. Yes, there may be a wait, but we continue to adjust. I think that is one of the strengths of the city and the Health Department. We are very nimble, and we continue to do quality improvement. For example, there was a period when we were noticing that demand for antigen or rapid tests were going up, and not as much of a demand for PCRs. So we adjusted and kind of split the lanes up so people weren’t in line for such a long time.

I think we’ve been really nimble and have been able to meet the demand and deal with the glitches in the system, if you will. I’m sure it’s still not perfect, but I feel really confident that if you need a test in Long Beach, you can get one the same day.

HM: We’ve seen some different approaches from employers and school districts when it comes to requiring testing. How important is testing for

in-person gathering at this point?

AD: I think the important thing is: You need to do a bunch of stuff in order to be as safe as possible. I think hanging your hat on any one thing—“I’m just going to have everybody be vaccinated and that’s it”—we’ve seen with omicron, you can get infected even if you’re vaccinated, even if it’s a lot less severe, and you can spread it to other people.

And I think the same thing goes for testing. We’ve talked about the caveats with testing. The issue with testing is testing is very good, but it’s not 100%. It’s not foolproof, so just to hang your hat on that and just say, “OK, maybe you’re vaccinated, maybe you’re not, but we’ll just require you to get a test”—that is not going to do it either. You have always needed a certain viral load to test positive. You can still be infected, and the day you take the test it’s negative, and you go to work the next day thinking you’re fine, and that’s when you start being contagious.

Relying on any of those things is not recommended. Rely on as many things as you can—make sure your ventilation is as best as it can be, make sure you enforce masking, be careful about staff eating together, be careful about gatherings, make sure if you can distance staff to distance staff. Make sure you encourage vaccinations, and then testing is another layer of that safety, so that’s what I would recommend for employers. ■

Amid low COVID vaccine rates, more California children hospitalized in omicron surge



Sonia Vasquez and her daughter Angelique Sepulveda leave a back-to-school clinic for COVID-19 testing, vaccines and free backpacks in Los Angeles. Photo by Lucy Nicholson/REUTERS

BY ELIZABETH AGUILERA / CalMatters

COVID-19 hospitalizations among California's children—especially those too young to go to school—are the highest they have been since the pandemic began.

Chalk it up to the highly

contagious omicron variant, kids exposed during in-person instruction at school and other public places, and infants and preschoolers being ineligible for vaccination.

As of early last week, the state had tallied nearly 850,000 cases of COVID among kids 17 and younger since the

beginning of the pandemic. Of those, 44 had died—equivalent to an entire school bus filled with kids.

“The wave of delta and wave of omicron challenged some assumptions we had that kids would not get it and got spared,” said Dr. Theodore Ruel, chief of the Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases and Global Health at UCSF. “Now we know that kids absolutely do get infections, and even though they are small numbers they do get admitted and some die.”

This peak in hospitalizations of kids across the state has surpassed records set during last winter's surge, said California Health and Human Services Secretary Dr. Mark Ghaly. The state reached a high of 90 pediatric admissions in one day on Jan. 4, according to the California Department of Public Health. The previous high of 41 pediatric admissions in one day occurred in January 2021, a record surpassed earlier during the omicron surge on Dec. 29 with 50 admissions.

“The case numbers in children are skyrocketing along with those in adults,” Ruel said. “Children were spared infections early on, and I think it was because of the shut down and school closures, and children

had less of an opportunity to run into infected kids.”

California's Public Health Department is running a statewide marketing campaign and doing community outreach to raise awareness around vaccination. The campaign targets parents and is going out on social media platforms like Twitter and Snapchat. In an email, the department said the community outreach is focused on the state's more impacted communities.

Pediatric experts across the state say that so far families don't need to go back to sheltering in place with children to avoid omicron or complications, including a rare multi-inflammatory syndrome known as MIS-C. They cite the need for schools and day care for working families as well as the social isolation that has made the pandemic tough for kids.

But they are advising families to revisit early pandemic precautions about limiting get-togethers, avoiding unnecessary activities and protecting their youngest and most vulnerable family members by masking, social distancing and getting vaccinated.

In Orange County, a child under 5

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Virtual Care

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At the onset of the pandemic, the facility rapidly expanded its virtual appointments, which then made up 60% of visits.

As the initial caution eased, virtual visits at Memorial dipped to about 10% of visits, but subsequent surges kept demand in flux. In 2020, the hospital averaged 840 virtual visits per year. That figure jumped to 1,063 in 2021, according to Memorial data.

Memorial saw 3,052 patients virtually in the first week of January as the omicron variant continued to run rampant, according to hospital staff.

Telehealth can be beneficial to a wide spectrum of specialties and departments, but it has proven to lend itself particularly well to mental health visits and case management, said Ardel Avelino, senior director of operations at St. Mary Medical Center.

“The retention of these patients would be compromised—the patients who suffer from mental illness and social services gaps,” Avelino said. “By providing virtual services, we were able to continue to meet the patients' needs.”

At St. Mary, the vast majority of mental health visits over the past two years have been conducted virtually, according to Avelino. In 2020, 1,003—or 67%—of 1,490 mental health visits were virtual. That figure expanded to 1,213 (87%) of the 1,388 mental health visits last year.

The reason telehealth was so critical early on in the pandemic is that so little was known about the virus, Tse said. Limiting the amount of in-person interaction was one method to slow the spread of the disease and maintain the health of hospital staff.

Throughout the two years of COVID-19, however, patients needed to continue their care, especially those with chronic illnesses, Tse said.

“There is always ongoing care and maintenance care—both in adults and pediatrics that needs to happen,” Tse said. “Health is important and healthcare needs to continue on.”

Left without a means to connect with doctors virtually, pandemic conditions could result in missed diagnoses or a lapse in care. Check-ups inform doctors when ailments worsen, Tse said, which



Dr. Kavita Sharma visits with a patient and her mother via Zoom. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

could mean they could require surgery and adjustments to medications. Not taking these actions in a timely manner could result in significant negative effects, Tse added, including death.

Virtual care became particularly critical at St. Mary's CARE Center, which provides services for the area's LGBTQ+ community, Avelino said. The online service has been critical in minimizing delays in care, including HIV diagnoses, treatment regimens, sustained viral suppression and prevention of new infections, he said.

Early in the pandemic, doctors were seeing patients avoid hospitals at all costs for fear of catching the virus, Tse said. This resulted in patients becoming even sicker than they would have in normal circumstances. With the current surge of the omicron variant, hospitals are facing the opposite: Emergency departments and urgent cares are being inundated with people seeking COVID testing or treatment for mild symptoms, Tse said.

When an ER becomes overcrowded with people not experiencing an emergency, it becomes a dangerous situation for those who are, Tse said.

“We have to keep our emergency departments and ambulatory services available for things that are more urgent,” Tse said, urging residents to utilize telehealth when possible. “The heart attacks, the accidents, the traumas, the strokes—they're all still happening during this surge.”

Hospital staff have been pushed to the brink throughout the pandemic, battling surges, crowded hospitals and staffing shortages. The flexibility of virtual care was a vehicle to help some avoid burnout, Avelino said, noting that staff could conduct virtual visits from home.

The medium also is convenient for patients, especially those who require frequent visits and those with mobility issues, Avelino added. However, there remains the challenge of the digital divide, which sees many households still

without internet access, Tse said.

Technological advances are driving telehealth, Avelino said. Products such as smartphones and watches and fitness trackers such as Fitbit can be integrated into telehealth as a means to monitor patient health from afar. Some patients are even being issued equipment such as blood pressure cuffs to take home so they can provide their doctors with certain information during virtual visits.

Both Avelino and Tse concede that it is impossible for virtual care to fully replace in-person healthcare services, with countless procedures requiring the patient to be present. Also, there is a lot to be said for face-to-face conversations, especially when giving difficult news, Tse said. But virtual care is certainly here to stay in a more prevalent capacity, they said.

“Virtual care is really an innovative approach and its utility has been validated by the unprecedented pandemic,” Avelino said. “It's really poised to transform the healthcare industry.” ■

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Nursing Shortage

Continued from cover

selective with inpatient admission based on urgency.

The nursing shortage presented itself across the U.S. in 2012, according to a medically reviewed 2021 Healthcare report. More than 1 million new registered nurses will be needed by 2030 to meet healthcare demands, the report states.

“In addition to newly created roles, the roles of nurses expected to retire or leave the profession will also need to be filled,” the report said. “The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects this will create a total of 175,900 openings for

RNs every year until 2029.”

California has the greatest need for nurses, according to the report, followed by Texas, New Jersey, South Carolina, Alaska, Georgia and South Dakota.

There are numerous reasons for the shortage, including the aging Baby Boomer generation, healthcare reform, retirement and burnout. Two years of dealing with the coronavirus only has intensified those issues, Garcia said.

Amid the pandemic, some healthcare workers have opted to retire early, change careers or move to other areas to be closer to family, Garcia explained. They work eight- to 12-hour shifts, with some picking up extra shifts to offset the shortage.

Those who remain on the job must juggle family needs as the pandemic continues, including those whose children may still require remote learning.

“And then there are health care workers who are frustrated,” Garcia said. “Health care workers are seen as heroes but they see a community that is not willing to do the one thing that can slow this pandemic down and bring balance back into their lives—and that is vaccination.”

“The frustration can wear nurses down physically and mentally,” Garcia added, “and certainly impairs joy at work.”

The effects of the pandemic are not isolated to work for staff, Garcia said. MemorialCare has created a number of

initiatives and resources to help combat burnout, including Well-Being In Stressful Events (WISE) teams of psychiatrists, counselors and spiritual care leaders who meet with staff on their units.

To relieve some of the burden off hospital staff, people should wear masks and social distance in public, as well as receive the COVID-19 vaccine and booster, the two hospitals emphasized.

“It's important for hospitals and urgent care centers to be able to care for patients with the most immediate need,” Garcia said. “All of the preventative measures we've been discussing since the pandemic began ... are effective. Vaccines work.” ■

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Children

Continued from page 6

died from COVID complications in December, according to the county's health agency.

California mirrors the nation in seeing the highest number of pediatric hospitalizations with COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic, said Dr. Rochelle Walensky, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in a briefing earlier this month. Still, hospitalizations have been relatively low with rates of 4 in 100,000 for those under 5 and 1 in 100,000 for kids 5 and above.

Dr. Colleen Kraft, a pediatrician at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, worries about the number of sick kids because even a small percentage could mean thousands of ill children. Already this year, among symptomatic kids in the emergency department, 45% are testing positive, up from 2.9% in November, she said.

"Omicron is so contagious that the people that are unvaccinated are at highest risk," Kraft said. "In many cases we have families and parents who could be vaccinated who are choosing not to and they are putting everyone at risk."

At her hospital in the Hollywood area of Los Angeles, 41 children were

admitted earlier this month, and a quarter of them were in the intensive care unit, she said. It was the highest number of admissions in the last 12 months for the hospital.

She is most concerned about children who are not vaccinated, especially those under 5.

"Parents and family members that come in contact with them should be vaccinated," Kraft said. "For the next few weeks while the cases are really high, they should think about whether they want to be doing their extra activities or things that are more optional."

In California, 65% of children aged 12 to 17 were vaccinated as of early last week, while just 19% of youngsters aged 5 to 11 were vaccinated, according to state data. Those figures were just slightly ahead of national averages of 54% and 16%, respectively.

For one family in Orange County, the consequences of the surging omicron variant came due just after the new year when their toddler was hospitalized with COVID-19.

Adeline Zermeno, 2, developed a fever around Christmas and tested negative for COVID. A little more than a week later, she landed in the hospital after a 10-day stretch of nonstop fever that reached 104.9, fatigue and a positive COVID test, said her mom,

Lindsey Zermeno.

Adeline spent two nights in the hospital with ear and sinus infections brought on by COVID and is still dealing with a lingering viral rash. Her big brother and father got sick too, but their cases were mild.

The family had gathered with their extended family for Christmas and everyone who could be vaccinated. Still, nine of the 23 attendees got sick, including Adeline.

"It felt incredibly scary," said Lindsey Zermeno, a nurse at Children's Hospital Orange County, where her daughter was admitted. "There is so much that is unknown about COVID, and although for the most part many people get through it just fine, there are still so many unknowns."

Now she is vigilant for signs of MIS-C, a rare syndrome marked by inflammation in the body's organ systems, including the heart, kidneys and brain.

"I pray to God that we get skipped over for that complication because it was so stressful having her in the hospital," she said.

There have been 783 MIS-C cases in California during the pandemic.

"It is rare but it is very severe and kids have died from it, they can require life support, it causes decreased heart function," said Dr. Angela Dangvu, a

pediatrician at the Children's Hospital of Orange County Primary Care Network who works at an off-site clinic. "It's all a balance. Parents have to decide what kind of activities are important for their kids and the chance of them getting sick."

In addition to the risk of MIS-C, children who have had COVID-19 are also at risk of what has been dubbed "long COVID" and, separately, an increased risk for diabetes, according to a new study from the CDC.

For all these reasons, experts said vaccination among kids who can get it is critical. If they get a breakthrough case, their symptoms are typically mild and the vaccine helps prevent longer term complications, said Dangvu, who is Adeline's pediatrician.

Doctors said drug-makers are conducting pediatric vaccine trials for those under 5 and recently changed the testing plan to include a third dose for those 6 months through 4 years old to see if that boosts their immunity to COVID.

As for Lindsey Zermeno, she can't wait for the vaccine to be available for her daughter.

"I'm very anxious for the vaccine," she said. "As a former pediatric ICU nurse, I've seen really bad things happen to kids because they were not vaccinated for the flu or pertussis." ■



Adeline Zermeno, 2, in recovery after spending two nights in the hospital because of COVID-19. Here she is enjoying her post-hospitalization meal. She requested Chick-fil-A. Courtesy of Lindsey Zermeno.

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Long Beach surpasses 100,000 COVID-19 infections

BY KELLY PUENTE / Reporter

Long Beach has now seen more than 100,000 COVID-19 infections since the start of the nearly two-year-old pandemic, meaning more than one in five residents have been infected.

The city on Jan. 18 reported 7,854 new COVID-19 infections, pushing the city to a total of 106,200. The extremely high number of new infections came partially from a backlog in test results, officials said.

The city averaged about 1,800 new daily cases in mid-January, in a winter surge that has seen record numbers of cases for Long Beach and the region.

After weeks of steady increase, Long Beach's rate of people testing positive appears to be leveling off, with a positivity rate of 29.7% in the middle of last week, down from 29.8% on Jan. 14.

In early January, the positive case rate was 20%.

The city also reported four additional deaths on Jan. 18, for a total of 1,092 since the start of the pandemic.

Overall hospitalizations inched down slightly, with 358 people in area hospitals as of Jan. 18, down from 367 the prior week.

In Los Angeles County, meanwhile, the number of COVID-positive patients in county hospitals continued rising in the middle of last week, with state figures putting the total at 4,799.

The number of those patients being treated in intensive care rose to 700 on Jan. 19.

The county also reported 59 new virus-related deaths on Jan. 19, bringing the overall virus death toll to 28,181.

Another 30,081 infections were also confirmed, giving the county a cumulative pandemic total of 2,343,821.

While the overall COVID hospitalization number remains below last winter's peak of more than 8,000, health officials stressed that the rising patient population is creating strain at hospitals that were already coping with staffing shortages.

The average daily rate of people testing positive for the virus rose slightly on Jan. 19, to 16.9%. The rate had fallen each day since the prior week, when it topped 20%.

A month ago, the testing-positivity rate was just 2%.

City News Service contributed to this report. ■

Quarantine Guidelines

Continued from cover

Rather than the previous recommendation to stay home for 10 days, the CDC's stance is now that folks should stay home for five days if they test positive. The same applies to those who are exposed to the virus and have not been recently vaccinated or received a booster shot. People who have been recently vaccinated and are asymptomatic, though, don't need to stay home. But everyone who is exposed to the virus should wear a mask around others for 10 days, according to the CDC.

The California Department of Public Health followed with its own set of similar—but slightly stricter—guidelines earlier this month. While the CDC does not include testing in its recommendations, CDPH asks that everyone who tests positive or is exposed to COVID-19 to get tested after five days to determine how to proceed. This includes people who were recently vaccinated or received a booster shot, even though they don't need to stay home after exposure.

The Long Beach Health Department, for its part, followed California's lead with its own health order, which also shortens quarantine and isolation periods while calling for testing.

Long Beach City Health Officer Dr. Anissa Davis said in a phone interview that Long Beach's updated health order was based on the CDC's decision and the data behind it.

"My understanding from what [the CDC] said is that they felt that you're most infectious earlier on in your disease course," Davis said, "so you're most contagious a day or two before you start

showing symptoms, to a day or two after. "So that information, coupled with the huge workplace impact that omicron was having, kind of guided them to change the isolation and quarantine guidance at that time," Davis added. "So we've adjusted all of our guidelines based on that."

The announcement of the new guidelines has been welcome news in many industries that have faced worker shortages amid the recent omicron surge. But health care professionals appear split on what the new recommendations will mean for the public.

"I'm actually concerned that there may be more transmission," said Dr. Timothy Brewer, a UCLA professor of medicine and epidemiology. "So among the recommendations is reduced amount of [quarantine] time for asymptomatic individuals, but given the data to show that omicron is more likely to cause asymptomatic infection, that means there will be more people out there potentially capable of spreading this virus to others. And while most people will have mild to moderate disease, some people will be very seriously affected."

But Dr. Jeffrey Klausner, a clinical professor of population and public health sciences at USC, sees it differently.

"There are a combination of factors that go into it," Klausner said when asked about his thoughts on the changes in guidance. "One is obviously recognition that efforts to control the spread of infection have failed, and it's actually good to update one's strategy when one is seeing failure of the initial strategy. If you keep doing the same thing again and again, expecting a different outcome, that's the definition of insanity. "Infection prevention at the

community level did not work," he continued. "It's time to pivot and do something new. And secondly, given that there is a fair amount of population-level immunity that protects people from severe disease, that also means that a lot of efforts to reduce the spread of infection are not cost-effective or worthwhile. And then lastly, with the advent of increasing availability of new therapies, the focus has shifted to getting people treated early."

As for what the new guidelines look like on a practical level, in a health care setting, Long Beach Memorial Medical Center's COVID-19 physician-in-charge, Dr. Graham Tse, said testing is still of paramount importance.

"We absolutely want to keep our patients and staff safe, and to that end, we take a more stringent approach in that we require testing before we allow anyone to come back to work, and we do not allow them to currently come back to work if they're asymptomatic and without testing," Tse said of Memorial's current approach. "We have a defined practice to ensure that we minimize the chances of anyone passing it on."

Tse said the CDC's decision to exempt recently vaccinated and asymptomatic people who are exposed to COVID-19 from quarantine recommendations has been controversial in the medical field. Even California's approach, which requires testing but not quarantine, allows for further transmission of the virus, he said.

"Allowing someone who's asymptomatic just to come back to work without testing—how does that fit in terms of the infectiousness and transmissibility of the omicron?" Tse said. "So we've taken a more stringent approach." ■



Darren Grant, right, administers a COVID-19 vaccine into 58-year-old Rosa Sandoval, left, during a mobile vaccine clinic at the rear of MacArthur Park in Central Long Beach. Photo by Crystal Niebla.

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Newsom's proposed budget includes \$2.3B for ports

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

California ports could see an influx of up to \$2.3 billion as part of Gov. Gavin Newsom's \$286.4 billion proposed 2022-23 budget, which he presented earlier this month.

The ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles are the largest in the United States, bringing in a combined 40% of the nation's imports. Since late 2020, however, the twin ports have been backlogged with ships and containers due to overwhelming demand and equipment shortages.

"Our supply chain challenges require both near-term and long-term solutions," Port of Los Angeles Executive Director Gene Seroka said in a statement. "I applaud Gov. Newsom for meeting the moment with bold leadership."

The proposed budget includes \$1.2 billion for port-related infrastructure projects such as bridges, zero-emission modernization projects and rail yard expansions.

The proposal also includes \$875 million for zero-emission equipment and infrastructure, \$110 million for a workforce training campus, \$40 million to increase the state's ability to issue commercial driver's licenses, and \$30 million for operational and process improvements such as data interconnectivity.

The Port of Long Beach, for its part, announced a data-sharing initiative last month. The port contracted St. Louis-based Uncom for the development of its "Supply Chain Information Highway," which is meant to integrate existing systems onto one platform to streamline data sharing among port stakeholders.

"These funds, together with our own dollars, private investment and new federal port investment in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, will prove to be a powerful combination that accelerates delivery of critically needed projects," Seroka said. "This suite of investments positions California's system of ports to be leaders in operational efficiency, sustainability, and job creation."

The ports also will receive untold millions from the federal government as part of the historic infrastructure bill signed in November. The bill includes \$17 billion for the nation's ports, and Newsom at the time said the state was going to be "aggressive" and "demand our fair share of investment."

In late December, the Port of Long Beach was awarded \$52.3 million for its Pier B On-Dock Support Facility, which will dramatically increase the port's rail capacity. The funding was through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Port Infrastructure Development Program.

Throughout 2021, the San Pedro Bay ports moved a record number of cargo containers. But the increased volume and velocity of goods could not be matched by terminal operators and dock workers, with a line of ships waiting just off the coast for months.

Continued on page 14



Customers walk out of a Ralphs grocery store near the Traffic Circle. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Majority of Kroger workers struggle with food, housing insecurity, report says

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Nearly two-thirds of Kroger employees say they do not earn enough money to pay for basic expenses each month, according to a report published earlier this month by the Los Angeles-based nonprofit research organization Economic Roundtable.

Kroger, for its part, claims the report is misleading.

Over the last 20 years, working conditions declined significantly at Kroger stores, including Ralphs and Food 4 Less locations, according to the report. There are five Ralphs and three Food 4 Less locations with hundreds of

employees in the Long Beach area.

The two brands make up 6% of Kroger's workforce nationwide.

Among the 63% of workers unable to afford basic expenses, 44% are unable to pay rent and 78% face various levels of food insecurity, according to the report. Additionally, 14% of Kroger workers are currently homeless or have been within the past year.

"Kroger's ... workforce strategy relies on poorly paid, part-time workers with constantly changing schedules," the report states.

The report, which was requested by United Food and Commercial Workers

locals 7, 21, 324 and 770 is based on the largest independent survey of retail workers in United States history. UFCW Local 324 represents the 607 workers at the eight Long Beach-area locations. Of those local employees, 72% are part time, the union said in an email to the Business Journal.

Nearly 36,800 workers were surveyed in Washington, Colorado and Southern California. Completed surveys were received from nearly 10,300 workers for a 28% response rate, according to Economic Roundtable.

Kroger issued a statement that said the Economic Roundtable report is misleading, citing a new report by Washington D.C.-based economic consulting firm ndp analytics, which was hired by the grocery giant.

"The ... 'survey' ... was conducted with limited data of select communities to mischaracterize The Kroger Family of Companies workers and their compensation packages," Nam Pham, managing partner of ndp analytics. "Any argument that the [company] does not pay its workers fairly and top market rate is not supported by actual evidence."

According to Pham's report, Kroger pays an average of \$18.27 per hour and spends an additional \$5.61 per hour for health care and retirement benefits, totaling \$23.89 per hour for those in the western states, including California, Colorado, Oregon and Washington. At nearly 27,000 store locations in those four states, the company employs nearly 85,000 people, 70% of which are part-time, according to Kroger's report.

"Kroger didn't respond to any of the issues we raised in our report, nor did it try to refute any of the facts we presented," Peter Dreier, one of the authors of the

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Transportation Secretary Buttigieg visits San Pedro Bay ports

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg visited the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach earlier this month for a boat tour followed by a press conference during which he discussed the efforts to address the ongoing supply chain crisis that has gripped the facilities for more than a year.

Buttigieg began the day meeting with port and labor leaders at the USS Iowa to discuss upcoming projects at the ports, according to a pool report. The secretary then boarded a Harbor Breeze catamaran along with an entourage consisting of mayors, county supervisors, labor leaders, members of Congress and more for a tour of the twin ports before docking at the Port of Long Beach.

During the Jan. 11 press conference, Buttigieg touted efforts being made at the local, state and federal level to alleviate the issues within the supply chain, including a large influx of money for infrastructure and other investments.

"When there is an issue affecting ports here, you will feel it as far away as my Indiana hometown," Buttigieg said. "This is not only about presents under the tree, but essential goods, like medical goods, that are needed in this



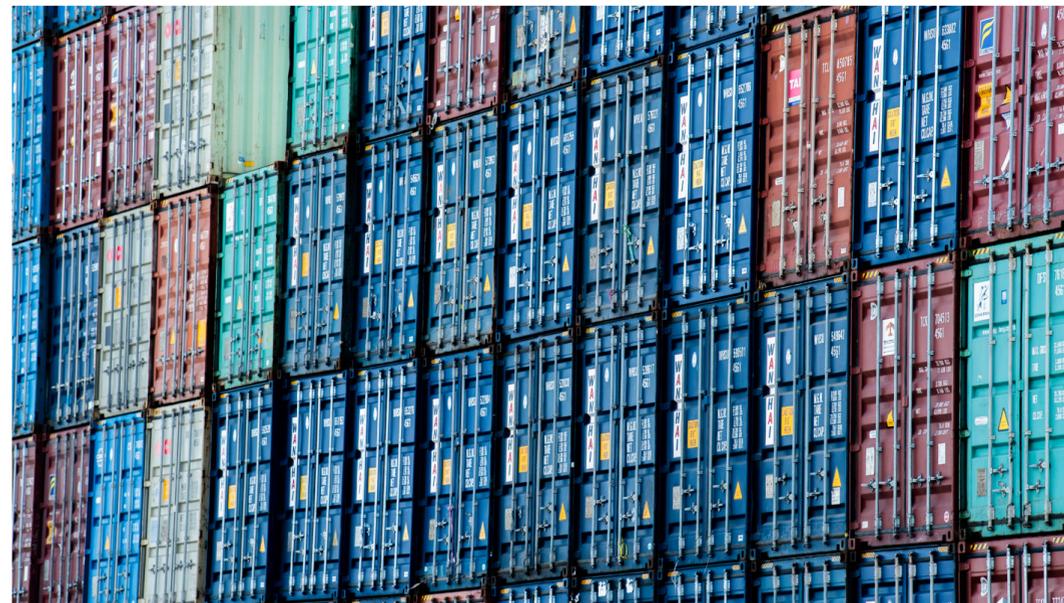
U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg speaks about the ongoing supply chain crisis during a press conference at the Port of Long Beach. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

moment of continued public health."

The secretary did not unveil any new initiatives during his remarks but highlighted several funding opportunities aimed at improving the resilience of the nation's supply chain, including a partnership with the state to fast track \$5 billion in financing for

port-related infrastructure projects, \$17 billion in funding for ports as part of the Biden administration's historic infrastructure bill and the more than \$52 million in federal funding recently announced for the Port of Long Beach's Pier B On-Dock Support Facility.

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Containers fill a dock at the Port of Long Beach in Long Beach. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

Port of Long Beach shatters annual cargo volume record

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Dockworkers and terminal operators moved a record-setting 9.38 million containers in 2021, shattering the previous record of 8.11 million set the year before, port officials announced last week.

In all, the port moved 9,384,368 20-foot equivalent units—the standard measure of a shipping container. The figure marks a 15.7% increase over 2020.

"This incredible milestone was achieved by the skilled workers who keep goods moving through the supply chain as we continue to seek solutions to improve efficiency, attract business and build for

the future," port Executive Director Mario Cordero said in a statement.

Imports increased 14.6% year-over-year to 4,581,846 TEUs, while exports declined 2.6% to 1,437,916 TEUs. Empty container movement skyrocketed 27.5% to 3,364,606 TEUs.

The cargo volume increase was driven by increased e-commerce, which began trending upward more rapidly at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, port officials said. People were traveling and spending on entertainment less, instead increasing hard and soft goods purchases online.

In partnership with the state and federal government, the port of Long

Beach and Los Angeles, collectively the largest port complex in the United States by far, took steps to expedite cargo movement amid the backlog, including expanding hours, creating temporary staging areas and encouraging truck drivers to drop off export containers when picking up an import.

The San Pedro Bay ports also announced a surcharge for shippers whose containers linger at docks for extended periods but have delayed its implementation for months citing a 55% decline in aging cargo since late October.

Despite their efforts, the surge in e-commerce combined with shortfalls throughout the supply chain resulted

in a backlog of ships and containers at the ports, which first began in late 2020 and has persisted into 2022.

As of Jan. 20, the container ship backlog for the San Pedro Bay ports was 103 ships deep, including seven waiting within 40 miles of the coast and 93 anchored farther out at sea or slow steaming toward the coast, according to the Marine Exchange of Southern California. The figure was a slight reduction from a record of 105 set the prior week.

The number of ships near the coast reached a nearly 90 in November, which prompted the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association, Pacific Maritime Association and the Marine Exchange to develop a new queuing system for vessels with the goal to reduce environmental impacts on residents near the ports.

In the long term, California ports are set to receive an influx of billions of dollars for infrastructure and green projects, including rail and electrification. Federal and state governments have announced tens of billions of dollars for ports and Gov. Gavin Newsom and San Pedro Bay port officials have vowed to get their fair share.

The port had 980 container vessel calls last year, compared to 1,042 in 2020, according to officials. The decrease was due to the elimination of "dual calls" for some shipping services that moved up and down the coast due to the backlog.

"The ongoing collaboration with our labor force and industry partners lifted us to this extraordinary record during a challenging time," Steven Neal, president of the Long Beach Board of Harbor Commissioners, said in a statement. "We anticipate further collaboration in 2022 as we work toward developing immediate and long-term solutions that will alleviate congestion at our Port complex." ■

Long Beach seeks to speed up cannabis licensing process with \$3.9M in state funding

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

With hundreds of applicants waiting for approval to open cannabis-related businesses in Long Beach, the city is trying to cut down the time it takes to process their paperwork, and it's getting some help from the state.

Long Beach is one of 17 cities and counties to be awarded a cut of \$100 million in grants from the California Department of Cannabis Control. The money is meant to speed approvals for provisional cannabis-business licenses. Long Beach is set to get \$3.9 million to hire consultants and staff who can process applications, handle permits and perform inspections.

The additional staff could both speed up the process and allow more one-on-one help for the 498 applicants waiting for approval from Long Beach, according to Emily Armstrong, the city's cannabis program manager.

Long Beach has already issued 252 licenses for all sorts of cannabis businesses including the 32 storefronts along with many other operations such as cultivation, distribution, manufacturing and testing.

Of the 498 pending applications, the majority are for medical cannabis with cultivation (88), distribution (87) and manufacturing (86) making up over half of the unprocessed licenses. The city allows the sale of both medical and adult-use cannabis products.

At its current pace, the city is issuing about 50 licenses per year and another 150 provisional licenses per year, Armstrong said.

The new state funding will "likely reduce the time it takes an applicant to get through the licensing process by half, while also providing better customer service throughout the process," Armstrong said in an email.

Some of the \$3.9 million is intended to help equity applicants, who are those with

Continued on page 22

State receives \$172M for water infrastructure, including \$8M for the Port of Long Beach

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will receive \$172.5 million in federal funding for critical water infrastructure projects throughout California, including the Port of Long Beach, the White House announced last week.

The funding is part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the 2022 Disaster Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, which were passed last year.

"The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law continues to deliver for California," Sen. Alex Padilla said in a statement. "Infrastructure includes the coastal ports and inland waterways that are vital to our economy, and the wetlands and levees protecting communities from storm surges and catastrophic flooding."

For the Port of Long Beach, \$8 million has been allocated to improve commercial navigation of surrounding waterways to allow larger and more ships

to pass, according to the announcement.

"Improving the ability of ships to navigate channels here will have economic benefits for the entire country," Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero said in an email. "Locally, creating navigational efficiencies will move ships through the harbor faster, reducing air pollution. There will be a good return on investment."

The Los Angeles River revitalization project, meanwhile, is set to receive \$28 million for Taylor Yard in Northeast Los Angeles. Other projects include \$35 million for the flood reduction measures for the San Joaquin River Basin in Stockton and \$30.5 million for the Encinitas-Solana Beach Coastal Storm Damage Reduction Project, which would reduce coastal erosion.

In all, 46 programs are receiving funding, including structural surveys, feasibility studies, jetty monitoring, infrastructure repair and expansion, inspections and more. ■

Long Beach CVB receives top industry award for migrant center effort



Marcela Cominelli

The Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau's Joseph Jenci, center right, stands beside PCMA Chair Kirsten Olean during the 2021 Convening Leaders Conference in Las Vegas. Courtesy of the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau.

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

The Professional Management Association, the largest network of meeting and business events professions, awarded the Long Beach Convention & Visitors Bureau the 2021 PCMA Chairman's Award for the North American Region, the CVB announced earlier this month.

The organization received the award in recognition of its operation of a controversial migrant center used to house unaccompanied children who arrived at the U.S. border last year. The prestigious award is given each year to an organization or individual for "unique contributions" to the meetings industry, according to the CVB.

"As events and meetings professionals, we practice hospitality every day," CVB President and CEO Steve Goodling said in a statement. "It was our honor to extend that same hospitality in service of children in need, and we feel privileged to have been a part of that experience."

The award was presented by PCMA Chair Kristen Olean during the annual Convening

Leaders Conference in Las Vegas.

In April of last year, the Long Beach Convention Center became a temporary housing facility for migrant children as they awaited being connected with family or sponsors. No conventions had taken place in over a year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, making the multi-million dollar federal contract a welcome revenue source.

"While the federal government worked to reunite these children with family or sponsors, the Long Beach hospitality community opened their doors and their hearts at the request of Mayor Garcia," Olean said during the award ceremony. "A toy and book drive launched by the Long Beach CVB resulted in 100,000 toys and books in just two weeks."

From April through late July, the Convention Center was home to 1,538 children, who stayed an average of 19 days. One temporary resident of the Convention Center, a then-pregnant 17-year-old from El Salvador, estimated she was housed at the facility for around 30 days. Despite the amenities, she said she was "really sad" being at the facility.

The migrant center closed one week

early on July 23.

While many local and state politicians hailed the Long Beach migrant center as a model, the use of the Convention Center as a migrant center was polarizing. Activists gathered outside the Convention Center ahead of the children arriving, demanding transparency and access to the shelter.

Days later, the facility was vandalized with graffiti such as, "There's blood on your hands," "concentration camp," "No Kids in cages" and anti-ICE slogans. Red paint was also splashed down the steps to the Convention Center on Pine Avenue.

Mayor Robert Garcia, though, said at the time that the center was a necessary step in the process of reuniting children with family members.

"We could not have been more proud to have played our part in a much larger national effort," Garcia said when the facility closed.

The CVB wasn't the only agency to assist with the facility; medical care was provided for the children courtesy of doctors and nurses from UCLA Health, and the Immigration Defenders Law Center gave the children legal counsel through their immigration process.

For its part, the CVB—with limited Convention Center staff—outfitted the facility with age-appropriate decor and lounge areas. The site also included a full-service kitchen. CVB and Convention Center staff also worked to provide the children with various experiences, including a Fourth of July celebration, a meet-and-greet with Dodger's baseball players and more.

The ability to provide the children a welcoming experience as they awaited more permanent housing was the primary reason local leaders supported the effort.

"To me it's a no-brainer in terms of what our options are in regard to these children," Councilwoman Suzie Price said when the City Council voted to move ahead with the shelter. "In my opinion this isn't a partisan issue, it's an American issue. It's a moral issue." ■

Continued on page 17

City Council clears way for construction of 108-unit residential building in Downtown

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

The Long Beach City Council last week cleared the way for a new residential development to be built at Seventh Street and Locust Avenue. Council members unanimously denied an appeal that sought to block or delay the development of a seven-story, 108-unit building within the Downtown development district.

The appeal, which argued for further environmental review of the project, was brought by a group called Supporters Alliance for Environmental Responsibility, which has a track record of opposing similar projects in the region. A representative for the group told the City Council that Supporters Alliance for Environmental Responsibility wasn't necessarily opposed to the concept, just that the project needed more review to determine its environmental impacts.

The group is funded by the Southern California District Council of Laborers, a regional umbrella group for local construction unions. A representative for the group did not return a call about why it's opposed to this and other residential developments.

In its appeal document filed with

Continued on page 17



Virgin Orbit's Cosmic Girl flies through the air carrying a LauncherOne rocket during the "Above the Clouds" mission. Courtesy of Virgin Orbit.

Virgin Orbit delivers 7 satellites to highest orbit ever reached during a West Coast launch

BY BRANDON RICHARDSON / Reporter

Seven more satellites are orbiting Earth after Virgin Orbit's first successful mission of 2022, which blasted into space earlier this month.

The mission, "Above the Clouds," delivered satellites for experiments in space-based communications, space debris detection and in-space navigation and propulsion, as well as some to be used by the global agricultural sector. The U.S. Department of Defense, the Polish company SatRevolution and Spire Global had payloads aboard the mission.

The January mission was originally slated to be the company's final flight of 2021—with the rocket delivered to the Mojave Air and Space Port in November. Final preparations, however, pushed the mission into this year.

"Our customers are starting to hear back from their satellites that are checking in from orbit—and for us, that's what success looks like," CEO Dan Hart said following the mission's success. "It's a thrill for our team that this mission included our first repeat customers as well as our first 'last minute ticket' customers."

The mission deployed its payload into orbit 500 kilometers above Earth's surface at a 45-degree inclination, making it the first launch in history to reach said orbit from the West Coast, according to the company.

"All of which confirms the team's ability to provide top tier launch service anywhere, anytime," Hart said.

While space launches historically take off from a stationary, land-based

pad, Virgin Orbit's LauncherOne rocket is deployed from a modified Boeing 747 aircraft during flight. The most recent mission took off from the Mojave desert at 1:39 p.m., flying to its airborne launch site 50 miles south of the Channel Islands.

Previously unavailable to land-based launches, the trajectory Virgin Orbit launched "Above the Clouds" saved the satellites months of time and kilograms of fuel they otherwise would have spent correcting their orbit if launched from land, the company stated.

Before deploying the LauncherOne, the Boeing aircraft was able to fly through weather and a cloud layer that would have grounded a normal launch during the Jan. 13 mission, Hart said.

"We can say with confidence that in this new era of regular, frequent, successful missions, we can help our customers and partners use space technology to advance human knowledge and open space for good."

The mission was named after the fifth track on Gang Starr's album "Moment of Truth," which featured Inspectah Deck of the Wu-Tang Clan. The record was released in 1998 by Virgin Records in collaboration with Noo Trybe Records.

"Above the Clouds" was Virgin Orbit's third successful mission. The first came almost exactly one year ago when the company delivered nine satellites into space on Jan. 17, 2021.

The firm has delivered 26 satellites to orbit.

Virgin Orbit has five more launches slated for this year, according to the firm. ■

Newsom

Continued from page 12

"The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of the state's ports and supply chain, so these investments are very well timed," Port of Long Beach Executive Director Mario Cordero said in a statement.

Prior to the pandemic, no cargo ships would need to anchor off the coast to await their turn to unload. The congestion began in late 2020 with a handful of ships and steadily grew until reaching a record 86 on Nov. 16.

As a result of the impacts of the congestion on local air quality, shippers were asked to anchor farther out at sea as part of a new queuing system developed by the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association, Pacific Maritime Association and the Marine Exchange of Southern California. As of Jan. 7, the number of ships waiting near shore had dropped to

12, according to the Exchange. The overall ship backlog, however, remained at a record 105 container ships for the second day in a row, with 93 vessels loitering or slow speeding more than 40 miles off the coast.

"Regarding the ongoing supply chain congestion at our ports, I appreciate the governor's focus on making new investments," Patrick O'Donnell, state assemblyman and chair of the Assembly Select Committee on Ports and Goods Movement, said in a statement.

"We must ensure our ports can efficiently move imports and exports to meet the needs of businesses and consumers."

The governor's proposed budget also addresses the state's "existential threats," including the ongoing coronavirus pandemic; wildfires and drought; homelessness; income inequality; and public safety, the Associated Press reports. The budget includes a projected \$45.7 billion surplus. ■



Gov. Gavin Newsom speaks during a press conference at the Port of Long Beach. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Long Beach could use bonds to increase housing for middle-income renters

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

The City Council voted last week to ask staff to come back with more information about how it could use tax-exempt bonds to purchase buildings to reserve for middle-income renters.

In Los Angeles County, the average median income is \$80,000 for a household of four; households of four would qualify for these units if they made between \$64,000 and \$96,000 annually.

Long Beach and other cities have been trying to increase the region's housing stock for middle-income earners, which often is not attractive to developers because it does not come with financial incentives like low-income housing, and does not attract high-dollar rents like luxury housing.

The city last year explored a pilot program with the state that issued \$144 million in bonds to purchase the 216-unit Oceanaire luxury apartment building Downtown and rent its units out at lower rates.

As part of the deal, Waterford, the operator of the building, stayed on as a project administrator and is set to receive \$11.5 million over the next 15 years through fees derived from rent

payments, and the city could opt to buy the building at the 15- or 30-year mark.

However, Long Beach and other taxing agencies will not collect property taxes on the project for the length of the deal, something that consultants warn is one of the drawbacks with these types of deals.

A November letter from CSG Advisors, HR&A Advisors and the California Housing Partnership to California governments outlined the pitfalls of these types of deals as more and more have cropped up around the state:

- The bonds issued are not rated, which means creditors have not determined risks and value of the bonds, as well as the probability of default.

- Many of the provisions of the agreements to date are not enforceable by the local government, like the amounts charged for rent and the length of those discounted rents.

- The repayment of bonds depends on rents increasing.

- And there is often no entity legally responsible for the property, leaving tenants with no one to turn to for issues regarding repairs and other issues are among the issues cited in the letter.

The way that the bonds are structured

Continued on page 19

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Buttigieg

Continued from page 12

Buttigieg’s visit came the day after Gov. Gavin Newsom unveiled his proposed budget, which included \$1.2 billion for the state’s ports for infrastructure projects such as bridges, rail yard expansion and zero-emission modernization.

More than a dozen officials spoke during the press conference, including County Supervisors Hilda Solis and Janice Hahn. Both supervisors pushed for the future electrification of port operations as well as increased rail.

“While the rest of the country counts on our ports to make sure their flatscreen TV is in stock for Christmas, the communities I represent bear the burden of the congestion, the air pollution,” Hahn said, noting billions of dollars have been allocated for a national network of electric vehicle charging stations.

“This is about the future of charging zero-emission electric trucks . . . and helping us to once and for all destroy the diesel death zone,” Hahn added, using the name given by environmental and public health advocates to the area along the 710 Freeway.

In an effort to alleviate some of the environmental impacts of the backlog of ships waiting off the coast for their turn to dock, the Pacific Merchant Shipping Association, Pacific Maritime Association and the Marine Exchange of Southern California developed a new queuing system for vessels. The result has been the dramatic reduction of ships loitering within 40 miles of the coast from a record 86 on Nov. 16 to 14 as of Jan. 11.

“This does not mean the issue has been solved,” Buttigieg said. “It’s not just how many ships you see, it’s how

many ships are on their way.”

The true backlog of ships remains at unprecedented levels. A total of 103 vessels were backed up at the port that day, the Marine Exchange reported. The figure includes 89 ships that were anchored farther out at sea or slow speed steaming toward the twin ports.

Port officials and Rep. Alan Lowenthal said that decades of underinvestment in the San Pedro Bay ports allowed the supply chain to falter under the extreme circumstances and demand brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the pitfalls, however, the ports moved a combined 20 million 20-foot equivalent units—the standard measure of a shipping container—in 2021, the most in the ports’ history.

Buttigieg praised the efforts of the ports, which have included examining a transition to 24/7 operations and announcing fees to motivate shippers to get cargo off the docks more quickly. A fee for containers sitting on dock for extended periods was announced in October but the ports have yet to charge violators, having postponed it multiple times, citing improvements.

The cooperation between officials at the local, state and federal level to take on the supply chain issues at the San Pedro Bay ports is unlike anything he has seen across the country, Buttigieg said.

“I am very confident that the visionary leadership here, coupled with the visionary leadership from President Biden and his administration, will deliver a better future for all of us,” Buttigieg said. “Nothing about this will be easy, but everything about this can make us proud because of the partnership, the teamwork, the commitment and because of the will to make the investments that America has needed for a very long time.” ■



U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg took a boat tour of the San Pedro Bay ports along with numerous local, state and federal government officials before speaking at a press conference at the Port of Long Beach. Photo by Brandon Richardson.



U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg speaks about ongoing efforts to address the supply chain crisis that has gripped the San Pedro Bay ports for more than a year during a press conference at the Port of Long Beach. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Boat owners say paid parking at Alamitos Bay Marina could doom some Long Beach yacht clubs

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Long Beach boat owners are protesting the possibility that the Alamitos Bay Marina parking lots could soon require payment to park, something that they said would hurt their ability to use the marina and potentially harm adjacent yacht clubs.

The Alamitos Bay Marina parking lots are located just east of the 2ND & PCH shopping center in Southeast Long Beach and have provided free parking for boaters and visitors to establishments like Schooner or Later, the San Pedro Fish Market and Ballast Point.

The 2ND & PCH center itself could be affecting parking availability, according to city officials, who said that employees and patrons of the center are using the lots to avoid parking in the paid structure, which is decreasing the number of spots available to the public at the marina.

The 2ND & PCH structure offers free parking for the first 90 minutes without validation but charges \$2 every 20 minutes after that, with a daily maximum of \$30.

A presentation given to the city’s Marine Advisory Commission in November included recommendations such as restricting the lot, establishing long-term parking for commercial and boat operators, valet parking and adding metered parking to the lots that wrap around the marina from Second Street to Alamitos Bay Landing.

Commissioner Bruce DD McCrae said he’s encountered not only employees from 2ND & PCH parking at the free lot and walking over, but others parking in the free lot at the marina before jumping on a boat to Downtown or other destinations.

“People that are parking there and taking the boat over to Downtown



A woman walks by the Alamitos Bay Marina parking lot. Photo by Brandon Richardson.

Long Beach and spending the day there. If they were to park there, they’d have to put the coins in the machine,” McCrae said.

McCrae did note that if paid parking were to be implemented, he felt the revenue should stay in the marina system and not be deposited into the city’s Tidelands Fund, something that has been proposed.

There are also concerns that a new housing project that could be built south of 2ND & PCH at the Marina Shores retail center could exacerbate parking in the lot, something that a city consultant thinks metered parking could help mitigate.

Establishing paid parking at the marina would require approval from the California Coastal Commission. Potential rates for parking and limitations for how long someone could park at the lots if meters were installed have yet to be discussed.

Jim Nagashima, vice commodore

of the Seal Beach Yacht Club that is located in the marina, told the commission that the club’s numerous races and charity events depend on the lot being free. Nagashima said a typical race requires about five-to-20 people per boat with the races lasting three-to-eight hours.

While the marina does have several rows of restricted parking for boat owners, Nagashima said that paid parking would not work for its members and their guests, many of whom are not eligible for the parking stickers needed to park there.

“The people who are out boating, how are they going to feed the meters when they’re out for a race for four-to-five hours?” Nagashima asked.

He said the yacht club, which has operated out of the marina for 50 years, would not be able to survive without free parking for its members and guests.

The Seal Beach club has contractual

rights to 241 free spaces written into its lease, but whether those will eventually be phased out is unclear. The commission is expected to send recommendations for the future of the marina lot to the full City Council as soon as February.

Joan Palango, executive vice president of the Long Beach Marina Boat Owners Association, said she believed the boat owners that pay for slip space at the marina have already paid for parking.

Palango pointed out that \$114 million in bonds the city took on in 2015 to make improvements to the marina are paid mostly from slip fees collected from boat owners. Slip fees range from about \$200 to nearly \$3,600 per month, depending on the size.

“The parking lot is an integral part of the marina, it’s a place to park our cars, walk down a ramp and get onto our boats in the water,” Palango said. “It’s not really free, I want to make that clear. We’re paying for it and we’re paying through our slip fees.”

Both Palango and Nagashima said their clubs require hundreds of parking spaces per month to support boat owners and guests of their clubs.

Many marinas in the city require boat owners and guests to have special decals or fobs to access parking. While the Alamitos Bay Marina does have designated parking for boat owners, it is open to the public and provides parking for restaurants in the lot as well as a weekend farmers market.

Metered parking has accounted for between \$1 million and \$1.5 million in revenue generated for the general fund citywide over the past few years.

The commission could vote next month to forward a recommendation to the City Council. ■

Officials want sped-up timeline for rail line that would connect Artesia to Downtown LA

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

A promised light rail connection between Downtown Los Angeles and Artesia is in danger of falling decades behind its expected opening date, alarming officials who say it would be a broken promise to residents in the underserved communities that would use the line.

The West Santa Ana Branch Transit Corridor is a proposed 19-mile LA Metro line that was supposed to run from Artesia through cities like Bellflower, South Gate and Huntington Park before ending at Union Station. The line would provide a “one-seat ride” for residents of one of the most underserved regions of the county to Downtown.

The line was one of Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti’s “28 by 28” projects that were supposed to be completed in time for the 2028 Olympics, but now Metro staff is saying it could take until 2053 for the line to be completed. Funding from countywide sales-tax increases approved by voters was supposed to help fund the project.

LA County Supervisor Janice Hahn,

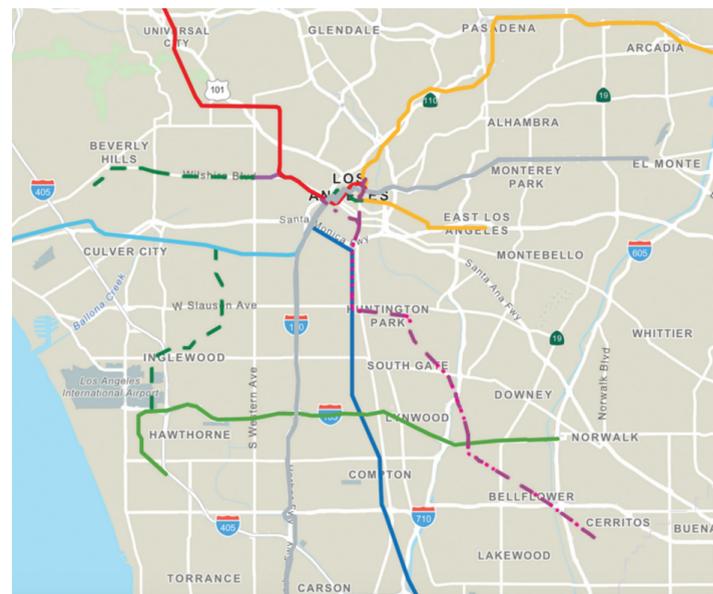
who also serves on the Metro Board of Directors, said the staff report given to the board in December was the most disappointing she’s read as a member of the board.

“I’m going to be in the West Santa Ana Branch in the sky by 2053,” Hahn said. “I don’t think any board member will still be alive in 2053. This is unacceptable, disappointing and whatever working group is working on this, you’re not doing it and not delivering it.”

Hahn followed up with a letter to Metro’s chief executive officer asking that a report on the project this month include answers about why the timeline has been dramatically pushed back and what can be done to speed it up.

Metro noted that rising costs have set the project back. In 2015, it projected that building the Santa Ana Branch to connect with the C Line (Green) would have cost \$1 billion, and connecting that section to Downtown would cost another \$3 billion. A projection for the cost to connect Artesia to Union Station is now

Continued on page 18



A screenshot of the West Santa Ana Branch line (purple) that would connect Artesia to Downtown Los Angeles.

108-Unit

Continued from page 14

the City Council, Supporters Alliance for Environmental Responsibility argued Long Beach broke its own planning rules by approving too much residential development Downtown.

The city’s Downtown Plan, which was adopted in 2012, allowed for 5,000 residential units, 480,000 square feet of retail or commercial space, 800 hotel rooms and 1.5 million square feet of office space to be built within the plan area, but the city has already exceeded that mark.

Long Beach has already seen over 5,200 residential units built in the area, but the development of the other uses outlined in the plan have lagged behind. Part of last week’s approval was an addendum to the plan that swaps out the square footage of the other approved uses to allow for more residential units

to be built.

A city report said that by doing this in the future over 3,200 residential units could be added to the Downtown area over time while still allowing the development of other uses.

A report given to the council said that every one unit of residential space equaled about 82 square feet of commercial space or 314 square feet of office space, according to a conversion rate utilized by city planners.

Long Beach could still need to maintain space for future hotel rooms given that a 30-story, 400-room hotel has been proposed and approved for development at the corner of Ocean Boulevard and Pine Avenue. The developer, American Life, received a three-year construction extension as it waits for the economy to recover before breaking ground.

The seven-story development approved by the council last week

will consist of mostly one-bedroom units (88) with 17 two-bedroom units and three three-bedroom units. It will also include a 135-space parking garage that will serve both residents and patrons of the ground-floor commercial space that is part of the proposed project.

“It’s an old vacant tire shop and we’d like to make something that can contribute to the Downtown Long Beach community,” Sandy Schmid, senior vice president of acquisitions and development for StarPoint Properties, the developer of the project, said during the meeting.

All units in the building will be market-rate; the project was submitted to the council before the city’s inclusionary housing policy was adopted.

If the plans were submitted after the policy was adopted, the rule would have required 11% of the building’s



A rendering of the proposed housing development that could be built at the corner of Locust Avenue and Seventh Street. Courtesy of the City of Long Beach.

units (about 10) to be set aside and rented at lower than the market rate for the next 55 years, or the developer could pay a fee for each unit that was not made affordable.

Jake Gotta contributed to this report. ■

Kroger

Continued from page 12

Economic Roundtable report, said in an email to the Business Journal. “Our report took over six months to do and Kroger’s response appears to have happened within 24 hours of seeing our report.”

John Votava, a spokesman for Kroger, said the grocer approached ndp in the fall and the two reports were unrelated.

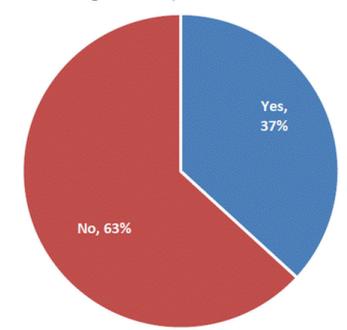
“We care deeply about our associates and show it through many actions like the continued investment of hundreds of millions annually to increase wages and rewards and provide affordable health care benefits,” Votava said by email, “as well as our commitment to offering an opportunity culture where our associates can thrive and advance, no matter where they’re at in their career.”

Dreier, meanwhile, said his report examined the levels of food and housing insecurity, homelessness, emotional stress, scheduling problems, heavy workloads, COVID-related workplace issues and concerns around wages, part-time employment and inadequate staffing.

“[Kroger] tried to make the case that it paid decent wages, but didn’t identify what levels of employees were included, nor did it indicate the extent to which they are full time or part time,” Dreier said. “Nor did Kroger look at the impact of those wages on the lives of its employees, which our report does in great detail.”

Part-time employees make up 70% of Kroger’s workforce, according to the Economic Roundtable report. Those employees average 1,560 annual working

Figure 19: “Do you earn enough money to pay for basic expenses every month?”



Source: Survey responses by 10,287 Kroger workers represented by UFCW Locals 7, 21, 324, 770.

Courtesy of Economic Roundtable.

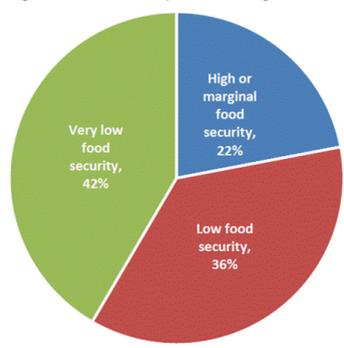
hours—30 hours per week—the report states, and many want to work more hours. One solution for struggling employees is to make them full time with an hourly wage of \$22, which equates to \$45,760 per year, the report states.

“The average annual earnings of Kroger workers, however, equal \$29,655,” the report states. “This is \$16,105 short of the annual income needed to pay for basic necessities required for the living wage.”

The report outlines other recommendations for Kroger to rectify issues faced by its workers, including:

- Housing assistance for those experiencing homelessness or facing the threat of eviction.
- Doubling the share of full-time staff from 30% to 60%.

Figure 23: Food Security Level of Kroger Workers



Source: Survey responses by 10,287 Kroger workers represented by UFCW Locals 7, 21, 324, 770.

- A 50% discount on groceries for employees.
- Childcare subsidies for working parents.
- One week advance notice for scheduling changes of part-time workers, with overtime pay if notice is not given.
- The addition of two positions on the Kroger Board of Directors for unionized employees elected by their peers as well as regional worker representative committees.
- Amended guidelines for the SNAP program to require a living wage for grocery workers at stores that accept SNAP benefits.
- Public support for food cooperatives that pay living wages in underserved neighborhoods.
- The promotion of food policy councils.

The Economic Roundtable was established in 1983 as a research group within the LA County government. In 1991, the Board of Supervisors unanimously endorsed converting the group into an independent research organization to work on social and economic problems. Since that conversion, the group has conducted dozens of projects sponsored by more than 80 foundations and nonprofits as well as public and labor organizations.

Grocery stores thrived amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Kroger, the largest supermarket chain in the U.S. reported \$4.06 billion in operating profits in 2020, up from \$3 billion 2019. Despite soaring sales and profits, the company fought—and lost—battles against several cities’ “hero pay” ordinances, which required large grocers to pay several dollars more per hour.

As a result, Kroger shuttered numerous locations, including two in Long Beach, three in LA and two in Seattle. The closure announcements sparked immediate backlash by unions, workers and local politicians.

“Kroger has demonstrated that their interests are in profits and not people,” 9th District Councilman Rex Richardson said in an April 2021 interview.

The hazard pay ordinances cost the company an additional \$342.7 million in compensation in 2020. During the same year, the company spent over \$1.3 billion on stock buybacks. Kroger CEO Rodney McMullen, meanwhile, made \$22.4 million in 2020, Bloomberg reports.

The company is projected to have raked in \$4.15 billion in 2021, according to the Economic Roundtable report. ■

Time Square’s newest tenant is a wine and cheese shop

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Stephen Murray has worked in some of the region’s finest restaurants as a chef, but his recent return to East Long Beach has led him to turn in his chef’s jacket to become a small business owner with Wine Cheese Etc., which opened this month at 2938 Clark Ave. in the Time Square shopping center connected to the Stratford Square neighborhood.

The 36-year-old Murray’s new shop, which focuses on artisan cheeses and charcuterie, quality affordable wine and unique gifts like ceramics, handmade candles and gift baskets, adds to the Time Square shopping center that has undergone a makeover in both appearance and tenancy the past few years.

The center’s anchor tenant, Baja Sonora, is still there, but the scuba

store and trophy shop are now gone. A brewery, bakery, coffee shop and a pizza parlor have replaced them, and this month Murray’s shop has completed the overhaul.

“We’ve bounced all over the place, but now we’re putting down some roots,” said Murray, who bought a home just south of the shop in 2019. “We just think the neighborhood really needs some options outside of the Trader Joe’s and the Ralphs and very commercialized places to shop.”

Murray and his wife, Kerri, are both originally from Orange County but have spent a considerable amount of time in the Stratford Square neighborhood visiting grandparents, aunts and uncles, Murray said. While the shop will carry fancier items, Murray said he wants to be approachable and get to know customers and make personal recommendations.

The shelves of the shop are full of



Owner Stephen Murray inside his new store, Wine Cheese Etc., in East Long Beach. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

imported cooking ingredients like Italian flour, Spanish tomatoes and rare Rancho Gordo beans grown in Napa, and an assortment of olive oils from Greece, Italy and Spain. The back of the shop holds small treats like chocolate and candies, and kitchenware like wine decanters and paella pans.

Murray said that he wants the shop to be an inviting place for people to not just shop for wine and other goods, but experience them. There will be opportunities to meet winemakers and cheesemakers, and the selection won’t be a “big wall of French Bordeaux for

Continued on page 21

Middle Income

Continued from page 15

is risky, the letter said, and pointed to a 2019 project in Santa Rosa that has already not met revenue projections and has led to talks to restructure the bonds less than two years into the project.

The letter provided multiple examples of how similar financing to the Oceanaire deal, with safer underwriting measures, failed or required a government agency to step in and take over the property. The letter noted that between 2016 and 2018, the Illinois Finance Authority purchased five portfolios of existing apartments for \$170 million in bonds rated BBB or higher and all five defaulted by 2019.

Part of the issue is that the bonds issued do not require initial rents to cover the repayment of the bonds and actually require rents of affordable housing to increase in order to do so.

If rents do not increase to cover more than just the interest portion of the bonds, then the property could fall into foreclosure. In the case of the Oceanaire, if it fell into foreclosure, the city could have to make a debt repayment before it could sell the property, which could eat into the revenue generated from the sale that was supposed to offset decades of foregone property taxes.

“As organizations with decades of experience in housing finance throughout California, we think that deviating from the normal underwriting standards of all major banks and federal entities creates serious risks,” the letter said. “The greater the deviation, the greater the risk. We particularly think that relying on future growth in net operating income to repay debt is extremely dangerous.”

While the Long Beach City

Council voted last year to enter into the pilot program with Waterford, it wasn’t the only entity that lost property tax revenue.

The county, school districts and local colleges that rely on tax revenue also will lose out on the Oceanaire project and others like it, the letter said, noting that the city’s share is often five to eight times smaller than other taxing entities that don’t have a say in the deal. Long Beach is projected to lose \$8 million over the course of the pilot program, while other agencies will lose a combined \$43 million.

Some recommendations that could ultimately be part of Long Beach’s policy going forward would be to charge

a “host fee” paid by the bond purchasers that would recoup the city’s portion of property taxes.

The rents of any projects acquired through this process could also be linked to the state’s income limits, be no more than 30% of a household’s income, which is the federal standard for when one becomes rent-burdened, and be deed restricted for 55 years, all of which were absent from the Oceanaire purchase.

Oceanaire rents were standardized, with studios going for as low as \$1,841 per month and three-bedroom units as high as \$3,941 per month.

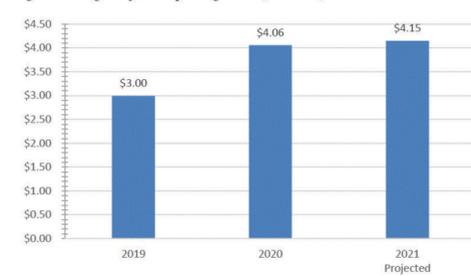
The city might also be able to count units acquired through this process and reserved for those making under

100% of the area median income as part of their Regional Housing Needs Assessment goals.

Long Beach has a goal of creating 26,502 total units by 2031, and 4,158 of those units should go toward moderate-income households. Under Assembly Bill 787, which was signed into law in September, Long Beach could create 25% (1,040) of its moderate-income units through acquisition and deed restrictions.

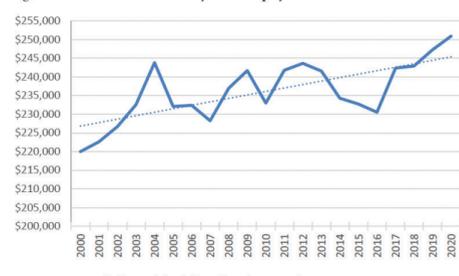
The City Council is expected to receive an update on the policy within the next few months, when it could vote to approve guidelines for any future acquisitions the city makes of new or existing rental units. ■

Figure 93: Kroger Adjusted Operating Profits (in Billions)



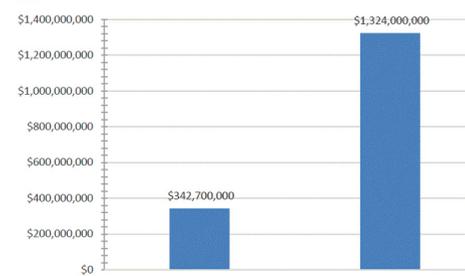
Source: Kroger 10K and 8K reports.

Figure 84: Annual Sales Per Grocery Store Employee in the United States



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, dollars adjusted to 2020 value.

Figure 100: Kroger Expenditures for Hazard Pay versus Stock Buybacks in Fiscal Year 2020



Source: Kroger Company press releases.

Charts courtesy of Economic Roundtable.

Rail Line

Continued from page 16

over \$8.5 billion, according to Metro.

Metro staff is proposing a shorter version of the project that would end at the Slauson Station where riders of the Santa Ana Branch would have to transfer onto the A Line to continue to Union Station.

That version would be cheaper (\$4.9 billion) but could create a slow-down of service for A Line riders. Members of the public expressed anger at the proposal because the community was promised a line that went from Artesia to Union Station, not to the Slauson Station.

“If it ends at Slauson it would be a repeat

of the Green Line ending before it reaches LAX,” Estela Lopez, executive director of the Downtown Industrial District Business Improvement District, said last month. “It would be a dream deferred.”

Hahn and Board Member Fernando Dutra asked that staff explore all options to speed construction. That could include pursuing additional state and federal funding, which Metro staff said it already is, or looking at postponing other projects.

James De La Loza, chief planning officer for Metro, said that the line is likely not going to be completed by the 2028 goal date originally outlined by Garcetti. De La Loza said last month that even if Metro had the \$8.5 billion

to build the project now, it would take about 10 years to complete it.

De La Loza noted it’s a very complex project that would include widening the 105 Freeway. All versions of the line would include a mix of crossings that would be above and below the street surface as well as crossing over multiple freeways.

In addition to local tax measures, Metro is looking at the potential of levying additional taxes and or financing debt based on the new assessed value of the surrounding properties adjacent to the West Santa Ana Branch line that could produce billions for the project. However, that’s considered a less certain form of funding.

Metro said it has made attempts to secure private funding for a public-

private partnership solution to the current funding gap. If Metro is able to bring on private investors, the timeline could be shortened, according to Metro staff.

The next regular meeting of the board of directors is scheduled for Jan. 27 at 10 a.m. The board is expected to choose a terminus for the new line and one of the four alternatives outlined in Metro documents.

Hahn also presented an update to the Eco-Rapid Transit Board of Directors earlier this month. The joint-powers authority was formed to create a transit option for southeast Los Angeles County and has representatives from many of the cities that the West Santa Ana Branch would service. ■



The Oceanaire apartments on the 100 block of Ocean Blvd. in Long Beach. A pilot program transformed them into moderate-income housing. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

‘East End’ homes are rising to the million-dollar mark

BY TIM GROBATY / Columnist

Realtors and real estate websites have taken to calling East Long Beach “The East End” in recent months, perhaps to avoid the confusion that’s existed since the 1960s between the Eastside and East Long Beach, but perhaps also to indicate that houses in the area are approaching and occasionally surpassing the million-dollar mark and that the sprawling area is deserving of a tonier name.

Long Beach’s Eastside was once the area that, simply put, was east of the Westside, and the name has largely fallen from use as the neighborhood has been carved up into dozens of neighborhoods with their own styles and identities over the years, such as Rose Park, the East Village and Zaferia.

East Long Beach—pardon me, the East End—is generally the area east of Clark Avenue, sometimes Lakewood Boulevard—between Carson Street and, roughly, Atherton Street, with southeastern spurs running south to Seventh Street.

The vast majority of homes in the area—thousands of them—sprang up in an explosion of development and construction from the post-war 1940s to the mid-1950s. They were, for the most part, two- or three-bedroom homes and one- or two-bathroom tract homes. Cookie-cutter houses was the elitist term for them, and they were meant to be affordable for the families of workers in the aerospace and shipbuilding businesses who were settling here, starting the baby boom of the years following World War II. The homes started at \$9,500 in the Los Altos area and \$8,650 farther north in the Plaza neighborhood.

And now? Let’s just say if you’ve budgeted for a million dollars, you’ll be lucky to have enough left over for a couple of lawn chairs and a credenza. People who bought them in the early- to mid-1950s—and there is a smattering of original buyers in the area—as well as even people who bought them 20 years ago, are staggered by the prices their houses are fetching now, with median prices over \$900,000, and a handful of places now getting more than \$1 million, particularly those in the Cliff May Ranchos neighborhood, where one house sold last year for nearly \$2 million.

“The climb in prices has settled down a little,” said Realtor Joe Sopo who, with his wife Linda, specializes in the area. “Sellers aren’t having to remove contingencies like they were doing last year, but the homes are still generally selling for above asking price.”

Part of the increasing home values is due to the area’s good schools, low crime, parks, plentiful amenities and lack of apartment buildings. Residents here look askance at anything infringing on their single-family-home lifestyle.

Here’s a look at some of the homes on the market on the, shall we say, East End. They’re all three-bedroom, two-bath homes, mostly on proverbial tree-lined

streets; none over 2,000 square feet in size.

A home at 3939 Karen Ave., listed by John Maseredjian of John Hart Real Estate, is in the northeast section of the East End, near the intersection of Carson Street and Studebaker road, putting it almost equidistant to Heartwell and El Dorado parks, as well as a brisk walk to the Towne Center.

Improvements over the years include the addition of a large family room, a walk-in closet in the master bedroom and granite countertops. The home’s 5,534 square-foot lot allows for a big, though not landscaped, backyard. Maybe the nicer way to say it is the backyard is ready for your excellent gardening skills.

Another Maseredjian listing is at 5930 Deborah St. With an asking price of a little over \$1 million, the home’s standout feature is a large, fully paneled family room with beamed ceilings adjacent to the open and renovated kitchen.

Like all of these homes—and most in East Long Beach—it has a fireplace, and this model has wood laminate floors in every room.

Close to CSULB and steps from award-winning Minnie Gant Elementary and Whaley Park (named for Lloyd Whaley, who pioneered the development of East Long Beach), a largely renovated pool home at 1891 N. Britton Drive in Los Altos is listed by Realtor Debbie Felix of Seven Gables at \$1.199 million.

This home has been upgraded to the extent that its floor plan has strayed far from the stock model, with an open added family room flowing into the kitchen. Other upgrades include electrical and plumbing throughout, complete flooring, recessed lighting, air conditioning and upgraded bathrooms and kitchen. The large swimming pool and patio are a great centerpiece for outdoor entertaining.

Realtor Vilma Hernandez has listed a home in the Plaza at 6822 Keynote St. for \$950,000. For curb appeal, there’s the trademark white picket fence. Upgrades include recessed lighting in the living and dining areas as well as the kitchen and hallways, and a newer roof and windows (about a year old). An earlier remodel merged two bedrooms to create a large master suite. The home is close to El Dorado and Heartwell parks.

If you like living dangerously, there is an unpermitted bonus room that can be used for guests, an office or playroom that’s not included in its reported size of 1,474 square feet.

Going out with a bang, a classic Cliff May in the Ranchos tract east of Studebaker is listed by Realtor Kelsea Mazzocco of First Team at \$1.4 million which, if style is your top priority, isn’t a ridiculous price these days.

The house, at 7213 E. Lanai St., is a perfectly restored and preserved mid-modern Cliff May, with a great outdoors, virtually doubling the home’s larger-than-average 1,851 square feet of living space, weather permitting, and it usually does. The property is dotted with conversation and party spaces, including a raised deck



This home on Karen Avenue is listed for \$983,000. Listing photo.



A three-bed, two-bath home on Deborah Street in East Long Beach is listed at a bit over \$1 million. Listing photo.



A pool home on Britton Drive is on the market for \$1.2 million. Listing photo.



A home on Keynote Street near two Long Beach parks is listed at \$950,000. Listing photo.



A beautiful example of a Cliff May Rancho on Lanai Street is on the market at \$1.4 million. Listing photo.

and fire pit.

The kitchen is wide open and anchored by a large island and featuring birch and maple cabinetry and quartz countertops. As always with Cliff Mays, there is

little separating the indoors from the exterior, and this home, a great example of the style, has inviting mature trees and foliage to accentuate the feeling of living comfortably with nature. ■

AbilityFirst takes people-first approach to disability care

BY TESS KAZENOFF / Reporter

AbilityFirst aims to provide every possible experience to its participants—sometimes kayaking and sailing, or a baseball game or trip to SeaWorld. They’ve attended adaptive ski school, and have even gone to casinos and bars.

While the organization serves those with disabilities, its services extend far beyond the traditional day program.

“We’re really giving that individual the opportunity to participate to see if they like it or not,” allowing participants to truly discover their skill sets and potential hobbies, said senior director of programs and the director of the Long Beach center, April Stover.

Clients in the day programs receive the opportunity to develop plenty of practical skills as well, such as taking public transportation, calling an Uber, going to the movies, or eating at a restaurant.

“We may need to adapt things so that (people with disabilities) can be successful, but they have the same wants and the same needs that anybody does,” said Stover.

In its nearly 100 years, AbilityFirst has adapted to meet the needs of the disabled community.

First created in Pasadena in 1926 under the name “Crippled Children’s Society of Southern California” (a name changed in 2000 to reflect both the more appropriate terminology of today and the population it serves), the AbilityFirst of today is all about person-first language, emphasizing the client as an individual, rather than being viewed as their disability.

While society has come “leaps and bounds” for people with disabilities, “we



Jasmine Woodson, Annette Cruz, and Hannah Okyere from AbilityFirst’s adult day program spend time at a park in San Pedro. Courtesy of AbilityFirst.

[aren’t necessarily] anywhere near where we need to be,” said Stover.

But what AbilityFirst accomplishes through its several locations (its Long Beach center opened in 1966), is advocacy for those with disabilities, while helping to support its clients in becoming independent and active members of their communities.

While the nonprofit initially focused on providing day programs and therapies, as more schools began to provide these same services, AbilityFirst recognized the needs that weren’t being met, which largely includes social recreation and independent living skills.

Not only does AbilityFirst offer the first fully accessible camp in the state of California, but clients can participate in

a wide array of programming, which has only increased since the organization has pivoted more toward community-based support and employment workshops in the past five years or so, said Stover.

“Children grow up to be adults, and so we really wanted to make sure that they had programs that would allow them to continue to grow,” said Stover.

The adult day programs specifically appeal to the interests and desired skills of its participants, ensuring that they have the highest quality of life possible and are able to participate in deciding what kind of programming they receive, said Stover.

“If we’re not giving our individuals with disabilities the opportunity to experience all of those different things

that the world may offer, they’re not going to be able to make a true, informed choice,” said Stover.

And when the pandemic altered the entire scope of what was available to clients, AbilityFirst maintained the same mission of meeting their clients’ needs during this turbulent time.

“Zoom didn’t work for everybody, but it did work for a lot of individuals,” said Stover. “It worked for individuals that just wanted to make connections. There would be times where some of our Zooms literally were just some social hours because they needed to have that connection.”

And for those clients whose needs couldn’t be met online, AbilityFirst made it a priority to meet them where they were.

While Stover compared the experience of adapting to the pandemic to “building the plane as we’re flying it,” the organization was one of the first to transition to alternative location programming, meaning meeting clients in their front yards or in a park once it was deemed safe.

Through this, the nonprofit was able to continue focusing on the individuals’ needs such as social and independent living skills, while giving families a needed break, she said.

This February, Stover is looking forward to the completed remodel of the Long Beach center, which will provide more space and opportunity for its clients and their families, particularly for the College to Career and supportive employment programs.

“We’ve always been trendsetters, and so I think that we will continue to really see what our participants want, what’s out there and go after it and try it,” said Stover. “The sky’s the limit.” ■

Wine and Cheese

Continued from page 19

\$180,” he said.

The most expensive bottle the shop currently has is \$44, and Murray said he wants to keep the price range around \$20 to \$40.

“The wine world is very intimidating,” Murray said. “The way people often talk about wine is a big turnoff for a lot of people. As someone who’s been in the restaurant industry for quite a while, you almost need a Ph.D. to order a bottle of wine. We don’t want to be that way.”

The wines Murray carries are not for collectors, but for people who want an interesting, inexpensive bottle to enjoy at home or share with friends, like a \$22 bottle of a white pinot noir from Germany that Murray noted is a full liter and will pour five full glasses of wine, rather than the around four glasses out of a standard bottle of wine.

The selection is small, but like the imported beers Murray has in stock,

they’re likely to be things you can’t find at other stores in Long Beach. Murray said with a small selection it was important to him that the selection be interesting.

This will be the third store that Murray has helped open, but the first that he can call his own. He said there was always a plan to transition to something other than being a chef, considering that being a chef isn’t something a lot of people do in their later years.

Murray hopes that the shop will be able to introduce people to new items and teach them a thing or two about wines and cheeses, but not just for knowledge’s sake.

He said that most people want something they can enjoy with their family while sitting on the couch and the pandemic has increased the need to have nicer experiences at home, something he hopes his shop can provide.

“People need to eat and drink,” Murray said. “And sometimes even more so in times like these.” ■



A variety of cheese fills a cooler at Wine Cheese Etc. Photo by Thomas R. Cordova.

In last State of the City speech as mayor, Garcia focuses on pandemic recovery



Mayor Robert Garcia delivers his last State of the City address to a virtual audience from in front of the Terrace Theatre in Downtown Long Beach. Screenshot.

BY JASON RUIZ / Reporter

Mayor Robert Garcia delivered what's expected to be his final State of the City address earlier this month, promising a robust recovery from the pandemic that has thrown Long Beach into seemingly constant uncertainty in recent years.

The marquee speech, used to lay out the mayor's priorities for the city, was Garcia's eighth such address—and almost surely his last. Garcia announced in December that he'll forgo pursuing a third term as mayor in favor of running

for Congress.

In a scaled-down version of his annual event, which previously featured cheering audiences and dramatic slides, Garcia struck an optimistic tone that the city would rebound from the past two years, which were marked by revolving business closures, rapidly spreading infections and the loss of over 1,000 residents to the coronavirus.

"The state of our city is strong—because our people are strong," Garcia said, speaking from outside the Terrace Theater in Downtown Long Beach.

Part of the recovery, he said, will be

the launch of programs funded through the Long Beach Recovery Act, which will provide tens of millions in aid to businesses and nonprofits through state and federal funding distributed during the pandemic.

That emergency aid delayed what could have been massive cuts to city services in the budget approved by the City Council in September. Despite the temporary reprieve, next year's budget could face a deficit as high as \$36 million assuming the city doesn't receive another lifeline of state or federal dollars.

Garcia announced the day before his speech that a long-promised universal basic income program, which will provide 500 households with benefits such as \$500 monthly for a year, would begin accepting applications soon.

Other new programs on the horizon include free bus passes for K-12 and community college students and a centralized enrollment system for universal pre-K, he said.

Garcia touted the city's successes in combating the pandemic with 86% of adults now at least partially vaccinated, a number about on par with the countywide percentage of 85.6% for all ages. He praised the city for being among the first in providing the vaccine to teachers, dockworkers and other frontline professions back when supply was constrained.

Even as he touted a coming recovery, Long Beach is still in the midst of a surge in COVID-19 cases driven by the omicron variant. But Garcia pointed out that Long Beach quickly adapted by expanding its testing capability. The city is averaging 6,000 tests a day in 2022 compared to the hundreds of daily tests it averaged last summer.

"A huge thank you to our entire health care community over these last two years," Garcia said. "We are forever grateful to all of you and you are all our heroes."

The ability to find a testing appointment and the amount of time required to take one still remains an obstacle to residents trying to figure out if they've been infected, with lines in the city routinely taking hours to get through.

And while Long Beach has outpaced some other cities in vaccine uptake, several city departments continue to lag behind the general public—including the fire and police departments where only 70% of firefighters and 60% of police officers had shown proof of vaccination as of Dec. 28.

Garcia did not mention Long Beach's looming vaccine mandate for city workers,

which is still mired in negotiations with the city's employee associations. The city's police and fire unions have objected to the proposed mandate, and there's been no deadline announced for city workers to get vaccinated.

Garcia noted that crime in the city has decreased since the first six months of 2021 when shootings in the city surged dramatically.

"That points to a hopeful sign that we are well-positioned to make our city safer and return to pre-pandemic safety levels," Garcia said. "I strongly believe every person in our community deserves to walk down their street or neighborhood and feel safe."

Nevertheless, year-over-year statistics show Long Beach suffered through more shootings last year than in any of the previous five years. Overall, there was a nearly 8% increase in violent crime in 2021, but Garcia pointed out the murder rate remained flat in Long Beach. That's in contrast with other big cities like Los Angeles, where homicides were on the upswing.

While Long Beach has seen over 4,700 new housing units built during his time as mayor, Garcia said the city will seek federal and state help to continue construction to alleviate the city's housing affordability crisis. Long Beach was tasked with creating space for over 26,000 new units by 2029 through the most recent Regional Housing Needs Assessment from the Southern California Association of Governments.

Garcia celebrated the record-breaking cargo volume seen by the Port of Long Beach this year, which processed over 9 million cargo containers.

The "doom and gloom predictions of empty store shelves and a ruined holiday never happened," Garcia said.

And an infusion of federal funding could soon help speed up the construction of on-dock rail that could help process ships faster in the future, Garcia said.

One ship not mentioned by Garcia during his address was the Queen Mary. The future of the currently shuttered tourist attraction has now become a problem with a price tag that could be as high as \$500 million, depending on what the city decides to do with it.

The City Council took the first steps in September to possibly transfer the decaying ship to the Port of Long Beach, which could unburden the city's general and Tidelands funds from paying for repairs but would pass along the financial headache to the port. ■

Cannabis

Continued from page 13

lower net wealth, who live in underserved parts of the community or who have prior criminal cannabis convictions.

Long Beach has told the state that it intends to use the grant for other things as well, like website design, technology improvements and training to assist equity applicants. Automated emails, clear step-by-step instructions and workshops for how to fill out application paperwork are also included in the city's plan.

Long Beach is currently looking at expanding the number of dispensaries

in the city by adding eight additional storefront licenses that will be set aside specifically for equity applicants.

Measure MM, the voter initiative that legalized cannabis sales in the city in 2016, created 32 dispensary licenses, but all of those have already been claimed.

To date, the city has issued just one equity license (for distribution) but has another 12 equity applications pending, according to city data.

Cannabis tax revenue has generated millions of dollars per year for the city's general fund, which pays for everything from police and fire department salaries to parks and road repairs. ■

Way to go, Long Beach!



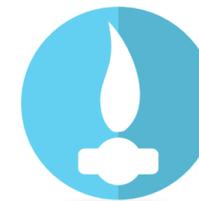
You saw the global rise in natural gas prices and you did something about it.

You conserved. You dialed down. Maybe you minimized the rooms you heated or made sure the windows were shut tight. Perhaps, you simply closed the fireplace damper and made sure the furnace filters were clean. Whether it was one, or all of these actions, the results certainly call for a big thumbs up. Long Beach residential gas usage decreased nearly **nine percent** during the month of December 2021 as compared to December 2020.

The real winners are the people of Long Beach. You fought against rising prices and made a real difference. And, you did the environment a favor as well. All of us here at Energy Resources applaud your efforts and hope you'll continue to make smart energy choices. So, continue to "dial it down", let the sun shine in, and enjoy the savings while you do the right thing.



December 2020
5,433,476
Residential Gas Consumption (therms)



December 2021
4,963,547
Residential Gas Consumption (therms)

**A volume reduction of 8.65%
Over 469,000 therms!**



longbeach.gov/energyresources/

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CITY OF LONG BEACH BID OPPORTUNITIES

TITLE	BID NUMBER	DUE DATE
Industrial Electrical Services	RFP	01/27/2022
Furnish & Deliver One (1) 30kW Trailer-Mounted Portable Generator	WD-22-22	01/28/2022
Furnish & Deliver One (1) 60kW Trailer-Mounted Portable Generator	WD-23-22	01/28/2022
Marine Navigation & Communications Equipment	ITB PD21-098	02/01/2022
Directional Drilling, Potholing, Sewer Locating and Clearing	ITB ER22-010	02/03/2022
Engineering Design & Construction Mgmt. GWTP-1 & GWTP-2 New Wells Project	RFP (O-0751)	02/09/2022
LBRA Black-Serving Mental Health Services	RFQ HE22-017	02/14/2022

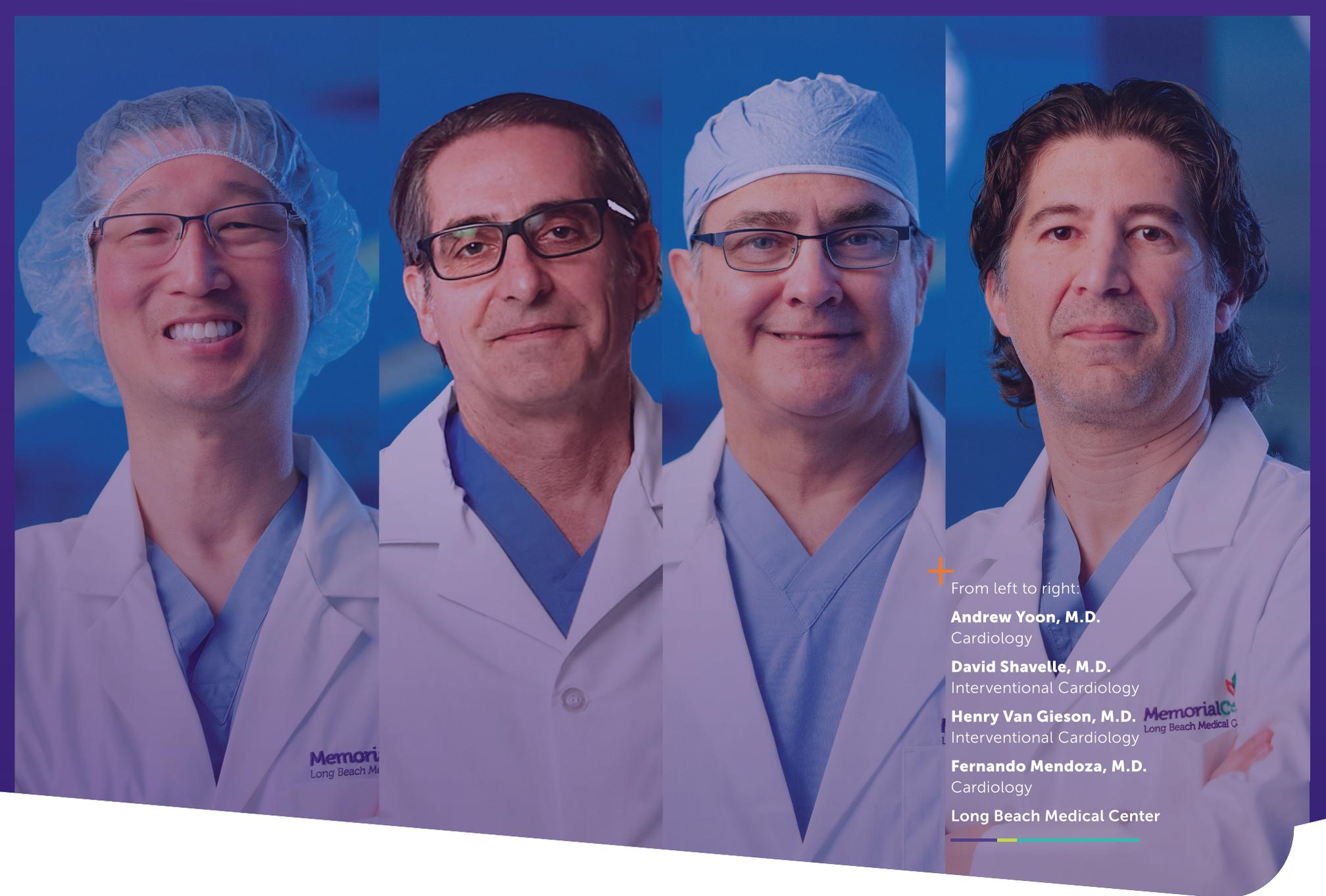
Bidder Registration

To receive notifications of bid opportunities, register with the City of Long Beach at www.longbeach.gov/purchasing. Additional details on upcoming bids and how to register can be found on the website.

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Feb. 1 & 15, 2022
Registration & Viewing Hours:
8:00 A.M. – 9:50 A.M.



From left to right:

- Andrew Yoon, M.D.**
Cardiology
- David Shavelle, M.D.**
Interventional Cardiology
- Henry Van Gieson, M.D.**
Interventional Cardiology
- Fernando Mendoza, M.D.**
Cardiology

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